The Eucharist:
Historical Development from the Jewish Seder to the Early Catholic Sacraments and Their Relevance Today

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Abstract

The faithful should not just be spectators, like listening to the proclamation of the readings and the Gospels, and not consider their true implications. They should not be ignorant of Christ, only because He is being presented to us as the word of God, or better stated, the word made flesh. When the alms are brought forward and placed on the altar, the faithful must understand what we believe and why it must be believed (Martos, 2001).

This line of argument aims to give further insight into the Sacramental overview, the Jewish Eucharistic origins, the Eucharist in scripture, the Eucharist as a sacrificial meal, in persona Christi, Eucharistic prayers, the real presence, the witness of the fathers, and their practical applications. Expectantly, the non-Catholic, the poorly catechized congregant, the Protestant, and even the non-believer will gain additional insight into the historic view of Eucharistic theology and be drawn toward looking deeper into God's truth (Hahn, 1991).

Unquestionably, Christ becomes present in the consecratory prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper and in the epiclesis. Moreover, of course, He becomes present once more in us, the body of Christ, when the congregant is united with Him in Communion. So, the unasked question must be asked. Why do some Protestants believe theologically that they have no problem with Jesus Christ, the second member of the triune Godhead, becoming man through a virgin birth, yet have an issue with Christ mystically being present within the elements of the Eucharist? Something to consider (Hahn, 2013).

Introduction

This thesis will expound upon and present the development and evolution of the Christian Sacrament of the Eucharist from its Jewish Seder origins and its memorial-based prayers, liturgies, and ritual. Likewise, germane exhortations will also be equally conferred.

The Eucharistic celebration was and remains a seminal Sacrament in Jesus' ministry and his redemptive mission (Spitzer, 2014). The liturgical Church defines this celebration as "the supper was a meal celebrating the definitive covenant of God with his new people: the gift and reception of a 'food' rendered symbolically present to believers the covenant that the fidelity had sealed of Jesus" (Duffor, 1978, p. 41).

The reality and effects of the Sacramental celebration of the Eucharist are so crucial to the modern Church that its Fathers considered it to be central to spiritual activity (Beaumont, 2019). From the beginning of its formation, the Eucharist was a literal Communion with the Savior, Jesus Christ (Brom, 2004). It also occupies a significant role in developing the Lord's house. The Eucharist is "the source and summit of the Christian life." What is more, like "the other Sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch" (*Catholic Catechism*, 1997, Sec. 1324).

The Eucharist, also known as Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, and even Jesus' Last Supper, played a significant role in developing his ministry. In truth, most early theologians passionately believed that the formation of their doctrines and dogmas occupied a special place in the organization's overall history (Kilmartin, 2004).

From its beginning, the Church considered the Eucharist an intimately spiritual event, a Communion, or union with the Savior, Jesus Christ. This profound sense of unity and communion with Christ is a central aspect of the Eucharist (Brom, 2004). Beaumont (2019) held that its early Fathers

considered the Sacramental celebration of the Eucharist to be a central spiritual activity for all its members. Spitzer (2014) also admitted that the celebration was crucial in Jesus's ministry and redemptive mission.

Accordingly, the development and evolution of this Christian Sacrament originated from its Jewish roots. Seder origins, memorial-based prayers, liturgies, and rituals (Mazza, 1995). As such, the early Church was founded on the belief that the Eucharist was a true sacrifice, not just a commemorative meal; something that can be contrasted with certain modern Protestant denominations. In addition, it has been established that the early Christians considered the Eucharist a type of sacrifice, which was proclaimed in their Apostolic traditions, the teachings and practices of the apostles, and Holy writings (Kelly, 1979).

Furthermore, an examination of the evolution and development of the Eucharist demonstrated why these Christians came to value a similar belief that it is the literal body and blood of Christ, which is a transubstantiation, as Orthodox, Roman, and even Celtic Catholics contend (St. Ignatius of Antioch, 2020). The Church did not institute the Sacraments, which are not the source of the grace they convey. The Church merely administers them through Jesus Christ. The Sacrament of the Eucharist is the primary component of the life of the Church and is key to forming the mystical body of Christ (Martos, 2001).

Any historical investigation of Eucharist instructions over the past two thousand years must include theologians, academics, and Church councils. Undoubtedly, the early Church eventually arrived at its theology and practices and even made changes not only to those of Jewish origin, but also to how the once simple Eucharistic meal developed into the rituals that became influential doctrines of the Catholic Mass. Likewise, they held that the Orthodox doctrines of transubstantiation, or the offering of bread and wine being changed into the body and blood of Christ. For the same reason, among its early Fathers, there had always been a unified understanding of Eucharistic elements and theology in its customary practice (Martos, 2001). With that said, it should be noted that there remains a division between denominations, even to this day (Newman, 1878).

Sacrament Overview

Unquestionably, an exploration of the historical and theological development of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and an overview of Sacraments and their theology, especially considering the ancient liturgical Church, would undoubtedly shed further light on the subject matter, like that of St. Augustine's writings declared that every religion has its visible signs or Sacraments (St. Augustine Contra Faustum, 400, XIX, Sec.11).

Similarly, according to the theologies of the Celtic, Catholic, and Orthodox Churches, including many Episcopalians, the Sacraments are not mere signs; they do not just signify Divine grace; instead, by their Divine institution, they cause Divine grace within the human soul (Kennedy, 1912).

Protestant Christian denominations believe that the Sacraments should be considered no more than signs of sacred things (Kelly, 1979). What is more, they deny that they cause Divine grace, which is clearly illustrated by Zwinglian theology that holds, "that Sacraments are nothing but memorials of Christ and badges of Christian profession," or as in Lutheran theology, they are "considered no more than signs of sacred things" (Pohle, 1909, *Catholic Encyclopedia*).

The term Sacrament originated from the Latin word Sacramentum, and from that came the Greek word mysterion, which classically referred to an oath or an obligation, but has taken on the meaning of Something set apart. For the same reason, there is no straightforward evidence that the word was used in a theological sense before the third or fourth centuries. In like manner, as they define their practice and theology, the seven Sacraments of the liturgical Church are the most visible forms of the outward expression of its ministry (Kelly, 1978, p. 193).

These Sacraments are Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Communion, Marriage, Holy Orders, Penance, and Unction. Importantly, the first three Sacraments are considered the Sacraments of initiation (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, sec. 1210). This process cleanses a person's soul from original sin and brings that person into the Catholic faith as a new person in Christ (Kelly, 1978, p. 193).

Furthermore, during the confirmation process, the Holy Spirit bestows a Sacramental seal upon individuals to empower them with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the Eucharist represents the sacrifice of Christ's body and blood within the Mass liturgy and is regarded as the foundation and pinnacle of Christian existence. Moreover, the two Sacraments of penance and unction, known as the Sacraments of healing, were established to fortify an individual's spiritual journey and soul (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1997*).

Additionally important to the Sacraments, reconciliation can mean a person who confesses a sin to a Priest, or who stands "in persona Christi," is representative of Christ and can absolve someone of their sin (Martos, 2001, p. 286). Plus, the anointing of the sick occurs when a person is ill or near death, whereby a Priest anoints this individual with a special oil that is meant to impart spiritual and physical strength (Martos, 2001, p. 325).

The final two Sacraments are regarded as optional within a Christian life and are referred to as the Sacraments in the service of Communion. Like matrimony, which the Church views as the union of a man and a woman in marriage, the holy orders represent the consecration of an individual aspiring to become a Priest or Deacon. It is important to note that, unlike a Priest, a Deacon may also be married, allowing him to receive all seven Sacraments throughout his lifetime (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1997).

In the second century, the Christian writer Tertullian translated the Greek word mysterion into Latin as Sacramentum. This word has a secular sense, which meant an oath of allegiance, like that of a soldier who might make an oath when commissioned. Augustine of Hippo, a fourth-century theologian, defined a Sacrament as an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace that was Theologically developed as a connection between Sacramental signs and grace (Martos, 2001).

Grace represents the favor bestowed by God upon His creation, deserving of His benevolence. The Roman Catholic Church has thoroughly elaborated on this theological concept and articulated in their Catechism that the Sacraments are effective signs of grace, established by Christ and entrusted to the

Church, through which Divine life is granted to us. The tangible rituals through which the Sacraments are administered signify and convey the specific graces associated with each Sacrament (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1997).

The Orthodox Christian view is that every Sacrament requires three things: 1) an outward sign, 2) inward grace, and 3) the Sacrament must be from a Divine institution. The Church also believes that all Sacramental work is the “opere operato,” meaning "the work worked," which is a manifestation of Jesus' actions and words during his ministry, and not the individual administering the Sacrament itself (Martos, 2001, p. 64).

Therefore, the primary moral agent of grace is the passion of Jesus Christ. Thus, the Sacraments are instruments of God, imparting His grace to those who receive them within proper Church norms because humanity receives his message through the price of his blood (Kennedy, 1912).

Both Latin and Greek early Church traditions demonstrated that the Sacraments have always been interpreted with the theological premise that they impart God's grace. This is shown by two selections of the Fathers of the Church, who laid down the foundations of Christian theology. The first stated section refers to the Holy Light of Salvation. This is the meaning of the great Sacrament of baptism, which is celebrated among us: all who attain to this grace die thereby to sin—as He [Jesus] is said to have died to sin because He died in the flesh (that is, ‘in the likeness of sin’)—and they are thereby alive by being reborn in the baptismal font, just as He rose again from the sepulcher. This is the case no matter what the age of the body. Whether it be a newborn infant or a decrepit old man—since no one should be barred from baptism—just so, no one dies to sin in baptism. Infants die to original sin only; adults, to all those sins which they have added, through their evil living, to the burden they brought with them at birth (Armstrong, 2019).

And the second quote regarding the foundations of Christian theology declared, bearing your sins, you go down into the water; but the calling down of grace seals your soul and does not permit that you

afterwards be swallowed up by the fearsome dragon. You go down dead in your sins and come up made alive in righteousness (Schaff, Volume 3, p. 96).

The early reformers insisted that they were following the ancient Church in teaching faith alone, and for proof, they pointed to the writings of Church Father Augustine of Hippo. Augustine's keen interest in the doctrines of original sin, grace, and justification made him the first of the Fathers to attempt a systematic explication of these Pauline themes (Anders, 2012).

In contrast, the Latin and Greek Churches historically held that the seven Sacraments were a means for dispensing grace; however, Luther believed that they were only a means to encourage a believer's faith (Smith, 2020). On top of that, Luther published a paper in 1520, *Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in which he attacked the traditional number of Sacraments, whereby he reduced them to just two: 1) baptism and 2) the Eucharist (Luther AE, 1520, 36:124).

Furthermore, Huldrych Zwingli, considered the Luther of Switzerland, differed with Martin Luther and the Catholics. He regarded the Sacraments as evidence of a grace already received, rather than that of a grace itself. However, he still incorporates the idea that the two Sacraments are the visible sign of an invisible grace. However, in receiving them, the believer only identifies himself with Christ when he partakes in a Sacrament, since it does not communicate grace itself. Even more, according to John Calvin, the two Sacraments are "an external sign," by which "the Lord seals on our consciences his promises of good-will toward us, in order to sustain the weakness of our faith" (Calvin, 1945, Vol. 4, Chap. 14, p. 1).

As one reads through the major disputes the reformers had with the Sacraments of the Church, it becomes clear that baptism was about meaning rather than substance. Though the Lord's Supper, or the The Eucharist was and remains far more substantial. The reformers objected not only to Rome's misunderstanding of the scriptures, as applied to the Lord's Supper, but particularly to the passage of scripture in St. John 6, which is commonly referred to as the bread of life discourse (Smith, 2020).

Also, Protestant understanding of the Eucharist differs in a significant way from the Catholic interpretation of the Sacrament. Catholics believe that the priest's words and actions transubstantiate and that the bread and wine that the Priests use become the body and blood of Christ (Catholic Catechism, 1997, Sec. 1374).

Perfectly stated, during the 400 years after the Reformation, Protestant Churches accepted only the Lord's Supper and baptism as true Sacraments, which were commonly referred to as ordinances. These two ordinances were regarded as accurate primarily because the Churches believed them to be based on scripture. Nevertheless, the significance and mode of baptism and the Lord's Supper differ from one denomination to another (Smith, 2020).

Jewish Eucharistic Origins

Each time the Eucharist is performed, it tells the narrative of how it began. The Lord Himself gave the first Christians this rite, which is clearly stated in Matthew 26:26-28. Everything else rests on the institution of the Eucharist by Christ on the evening before He died, and on the command that He gave at His Last Supper, “do this in remembrance of Me” (*Holy Bible RSV*, Luke, Chapter 22:19; I Corinthians 11:24).

Most Christian scholars understand the significance of the Sacrament of the Eucharist and the Jewish Passover Seder. The Eucharist should be understood as the updated Passover, especially since the earliest Christians did not invent their rites but adopted and changed the practices of their Jewish ancestors (Guerrero, 2020).

In support of this idea, the *New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* stated, “The Seder [Haggadah] is a liturgical celebration of Passover, commemorating a foundational event for Jewish faith and identity: God’s deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, Exodus 12 1-51” (Blickenstaff, 2009, p. 153).

On top of that, the Seder was defined by Jewish Rabbis as an order of a sacred meal with rules governing the eating and presentation of the wine and food, including the appetizers, main course, and

dessert. This order also includes the manual or ritual acts, such as handwashing and dipping. Also, the manual acts, and the order dictates the recitation of benedictions throughout the meal. In 1359, the The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church elaborated further that the Eucharist, the Sacrament of our salvation accomplished by Christ on the Cross, is also a sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for the work of creation. In the Eucharistic sacrifice, the whole of creation loved by God is presented to the Father through Christ's death and resurrection. Through Christ, the Church can offer the sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for all God has made good, beautiful, and just in creation and humanity (Kupa, 2005, p. 111).

Even today, when Jews and Christians perform their sacred rituals, the Passover Seder and the Eucharist respectively, it was found that the narratives in their rituals explain the symbolism of the food and wine used have a common thread. Liturgical, or ritualistic, Christians recite the following words from the New Testament scriptures, who, on the night before He suffered death, took bread, gave thanks to you, God His almighty Father, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying: Take, all of you, and eat of this: For this is My body which is given for you. Please do this in remembrance of Me. In like manner, when He had eaten, He took the cup. Again He gave thanks to you, God His almighty Father, blessed it, and gave it to His disciples, saying: Take and drink this, all of you: For this is the chalice of My blood, of the new and everlasting covenant, the mystery of faith, which shall be shed for you and many for the forgiveness of sin. As often as you do these things, you shall do them in memory of Me (Liturgy of the Celtic Catholic Church, 2018).

On the other hand, Jews specify the meaning of the unleavened bread, or matzah, as a bitter herb, or maror, and the lamb, or Pesah, and the four cups of wine drunk at the Passover as Seder (Hahn, 2001). Besides, according to Kupa, the Mishnaic Seder includes Haggadah, or the ritual retelling of the story of the exodus from Egypt. The Haggadah also consists of the Psalms, or Hallel, songs, and

benedictions used in the Passover meal. The third Passover Seder prayer declared, hence, after both Jewish and Christian texts were analyzed, it was discovered that the new Passover, or Eucharist, became a celebration for the redemption of sins, which evolved from the Passover meal memorialized from the exodus event. To this end, just as the Passover became a memorial of the redemptive work of Yahweh (Holy Bible RSV, Exodus 12:14; 13:9; Deuteronomy 16:3), so too the Eucharist developed into a memorial of the salvific work of Christ (Guerrero, 2020).

The study of the Eucharist is one of those theological doctrines whose origins have been concealed within the Old Testament. The Old Testament text foreshadowed the extraordinary reality of the Eucharist in several subtle, and not-so-subtle passages of scripture (Newman, 1878).

Truly, one of the first examples of scripture to allude to this Sacrament is the sacrifice of Melchizedek, which can be seen in Genesis, Chapter 14, when Abraham rescued Lot and his relatives, who had been detained in Sodom. Unquestionably, one of the most mysterious Biblical characters entered the stage. Melchizedek, the King of Salem, came out to meet Abraham. Biblical history has recorded that he was the highest priest of God. Nevertheless, this was long before the institutional Levitical Priesthood of Israel was established. Ergo, Melchizedek is portrayed in scripture as one who foreshadowed Christ with his offering a sacrifice of bread and wine (*Haydock Bible Online Commentary*, 1811, Genesis).

Another Old Testament example of the Eucharist is that of the heavenly manna that fed the Israelites during their 40 years in the wilderness, detailed in the 16th chapter of the Book of Exodus. This heavenly bread foreshadowed when Christ came to bless his Church in the book of John, Chapter 6 (Haydock Bible Online Commentary, 1811, Exodus, Chapter 16).

Likewise, in Leviticus 24:7 (*Holy Bible Revised Standard Version,* Catholic Ed., 2009), it stated that the bread of the presence was placed on a table in the tabernacle, as a memorial to the Lord; this bread was to be before the presence of God continually. Moreover, new bread was put out every Sabbath, and only Priests could eat it.

Most Catholic and Orthodox Christians are thoroughly familiar with this ritual. In all respects, Jewish practice set the obvious precedent for the devotion and reverence with which Catholics today treat the revered Eucharist, which is placed in the tabernacle of the Church sanctuary (Barr, 2018).

Undeniably, there are various scriptural narratives, such as Luke 22:7-20, Mark 14:12-16, Matthew 26:17-19, and 1 Corinthians 5:7 (*Holy Bible RSV)*, wherein it is shown that the institution of the bread and the wine has special significance beyond what is humanly visible and has a strong resemblance to the ritual of the Passover Seder, or the Haggadah (Guerrero, 2020).

According to the Synoptic Gospels, Christians understand the Jewish Passover as a critical Old Testament sacrifice, and more importantly, the backdrop for what is commonly referred to as the Last Supper of Christ and the Eucharist liturgy of today. Similarly, another necessary Jewish sacrifice was the Todah, more widely defined from the Hebrew lectionary, as a hymn of thanksgiving in a liturgical worship, or a hymn of praise and offering (Gray, 2002).

Historically, the Jews offered this Passover sacrifice after someone had been saved from a life-threatening ordeal. Essentially, a lamb is sacrificed at a temple, and the bread for the meal is consecrated the moment the animal perishes. The sacrificial meal consists of the lamb (meat), the bread, and wine, and is accompanied by prayers and psalms, all remarkably like the Christian Sacrament of the Eucharist (Gray, 2002).

Moreover, the Hebrew Torah means thanksgiving and strongly connotes praise. As such, these definitions are literal translations of the Greek word Eucharista, or Eucharist (Grey, 2002). The Passover and the Torah sacrifices were both peace offerings that shared standard features, such as the meal, the psalms, and prayers (*Holy Bible RSV*, Exodus 12:8; Leviticus 7:12). They had to be entirely consumed the same day that they began (*Holy Bible RSV*, Exodus 12:10; Leviticus 7:15).

There are two distinct differences between the two sacrifices; the Todah was celebrated through and for an individual, whereas the Passover was a corporate act mandated to be celebrated annually on

The same day throughout Israel (Gray, 2002).

The second Passover narrative is based on the Book of Exodus, Chapter 12, and was and still is one of the three major Jewish festivals. It commemorates not only the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, but more importantly, the salvation from the angel of death and redemption of the Jewish nation. The most important part of this celebration is the Passover Seder, or the special Shabbat meal, called the Seder meal, which is a festive spring meal full of symbolism that includes the sacrificial lamb, wine cups, four in total (*Holy Bible RSV*, Exodus 12); as well as its own set of associated psalms, better termed the Hallel Psalms (*Holy Bible RSV*, Psalms 113-118).

The most solemn prayer of thanksgiving is the Great Hallel in Psalm 136. This traditional psalm is sung at the end of the Jewish Passover or Seder meal, and was prayed by the Lord Jesus at the Last Supper with his disciples. Thus, it is gathered from the statements of the Apostles, which are found in the scriptures, that "when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (*Holy Bible RSV*, Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26).

The Church has inherited a lot from the ancestors of the Jewish faith. Its past cannot be separated from its Jewish roots and foundations. Theologians and scholars have, over the millennia, had the duty to "search for the origins and development of the Eucharistic prayer." It "constitutes one of the most complex and important aspects of liturgical studies, since the content and manner of such praying among early Christians," and has "significant ramifications for contemporary Eucharistic theology. Furthermore, "the originality of the Christian Eucharistic prayer can hardly be grasped apart from its development out of the literary genre of Jewish prayers of blessing or benediction" (Kavanagh, 1987, p. 33).

The Eucharistic prayer is the Church's prayer of thanksgiving, which is prayed over the gifts offered during the celebration of the Eucharist. It is also known, particularly in the east, as the anaphora from the Greek for "lifting" or "offering;" these two terms can be used interchangeably. Also, "the Eucharistic prayer had its antecedents in the Jewish prayer known as berakah," which is plural for

Berakoth (Kavanagh, 1987, p. 34).

Through prayer, the Church becomes an inseparable connection to its Jewish foundation, just as the great Hallel is central to the Passover Seder, as the Eucharist prayer is central to the Sacrament. The Eucharistic prayer is the central and definitive liturgical expression of the Church's faith. Suppose the Bible is the Gospel in narrative form, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church is the Gospel in doctrinal form, so the Eucharistic prayer is the Gospel proclaimed doxologically. In that case, that is, in the form of liturgical praise, thanksgiving, and offering (Kavanagh, 1987, pp. 105-106).

The earliest Eucharistic prayer known is the Didache, which dates back to c. 60. Though relatively short, it comes from the Jewish tradition. Even though it does not contain Jesus's words from the Last Supper, its inclusion of the term "words of institution" means it is a prayer of thanksgiving.
This translation is taken from the *Catholic Encyclopedia,* 2022 edition.

Concerning the Eucharist, thus shall you give thanks: 'We give Thee thanks, our Father, for the Holy Vine of David thy child, which thou hast made known to us through Jesus thy child; to thee be the glory forever.' Moreover, of the broken bread: 'We give thee thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge which thou hast made known to us through Jesus thy child; to thee be glory forever. As this broken bread was dispersed over the mountains, and being collected became one, so may thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom, for thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.' And let none eat or drink of your Eucharist but those who have been baptized in the name of Christ; for of this the Lord said: 'Give not the Holy thing to the dogs' (Chapman, 1908, Didache, Second Part, Ch. ix).

The similarities between the Todah and the Eucharist go beyond just their ordinary meaning of thanksgiving. Pope Emeritus Benedict wrote, "structurally speaking, the whole of Christology, indeed the whole of Eucharistic Christology, is present in the Todah spirituality of the Old Testament." As such, the Todah and the Eucharist present their worship through word and meal (Hahn, 1990, p. 31).

Through their prayers and the meal, the Jew would be reminded that the main point of the Seder was and is the goal of the Passover sacrifice, and its ultimate effect was the deliverance from death through the lamb's blood. It was not just any sacrifice; it was a sacrifice that had the power to save you from death. As any ancient Jew would have known, the Passover sacrifice was not completed by the lamb's death, but by eating its flesh. Five times the Bible stated that they must eat the lamb, and five times it emphasized the sacrificial meal. The death of the victim did not complete the Passover, but by a Communion of sorts, by eating the flesh of the sacrifice that had been killed on one's behalf (Pitre, 2016).

This sacrificial aspect of the Jewish Passover at the time of Jesus is essential to stress because people's concept of the Passover today is often shaped primarily by their knowledge of contemporary Passover practices. The Seder of today certainly has its ancient roots with the Passover meal celebrated at the time of Christ, but the significant difference between the modern Jewish Seder and that of the first-century Passover is that the Jewish Seder meal today is not a temple sacrifice (Pitre, 2016).

Moreover, it is worth noting that according to Jewish scriptures, the Passover was not an "open table," but rather a covenant feast, and was only available to Israelites. Any gentile who wanted to eat the flesh of the lamb first had to be circumcised and become a member of Israel (*Holy Bible RSV,* Exodus 12:43-49).

Similarly, the Catholic Church follows the tradition of a "closed Communion table." Those who are not catechized members of the Church or members of Churches in Communion are not allowed to participate in the Sacrament or the Eucharist (Catholic Catechism, Sec. 1400); the Eastern Orthodox Church also follows the same restriction (Krantz, 2011).

Dr. Scott Hahn stated that Joachim Jeremias, a great Protestant exegete, whose monumental work on the Last Supper concluded that it was likely a Passover meal. He summarized his findings in fourteen ways, stating that Jesus' meal with his disciples was consistent with a typical Seder in antiquity. He

defends every numbered item with scholarly rigor and abundant sources. Interestingly, the list alone takes up nearly twenty pages in the book's third edition (Hahn, 2018).

The Latin Rite Church has also drawn the same conclusion. The Catechism states the consensus of the ancient exegetical tradition, "by celebrating the Last Supper with his Apostles in the course of the Passover meal, Jesus gave the Jewish Passover its definitive meaning" (*Catholic Catechism*, 1997, Sect. 1340).

The Eucharist in Scripture

As stated earlier, as presented today, the Eucharist has its roots in both the Old and New Testaments. However, a typology of many things in the New Testament and the Eucharist is seen from the Old Testament. First, in the bread and wine of Melchizedek, his Priesthood acts regarding Abraham. After Abraham defeated Kedorlaomer and the kings who kidnapped his nephew Lot, Melchizedek offered bread and wine to honor God for His blessing upon Abraham. Abraham, which allowed him to defeat his enemies (*Holy Bible RSV*, Genesis 14:18-24).

Still, Melchizedek's offering was only an antitype of a Christ offering, as will be shown later. Christ's offering of bread and wine was changed into his body and blood to make the ultimate propitiation to God for the sins of humanity (Sungenis, 2009).

The offering by Melchizedek, the Priest and king "without beginning," said the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, was seen early in the Church's history, as an implicit foreshadowing of the great Eucharistic sacrifice by the son of God, who also is without beginning (*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, 1921).

Secondly, predating the temple sacrifice and the later Seder development of the Jewish people, it states the potential sacrifice of Isaac and the lamb of God (*Holy Bible RSV*, Gen 22:1-18). Scripture also records another veiled reference to the Eucharist in someone who was a Priest before the establishment of Israel. Jethro, who became Moses' father-in-law, was a "Priest of Midian," prior to ever meeting Moses

(*Holy Bible RSV*, Exodus, 2:16; 3:1). Similarly, Jethro eats bread with Moses, Aaron, and the elders of Israel "in the presence of God," just as Melchizedek, Priest of Salem, had eaten bread and wine with Abraham. Later, Moses sent Jethro back to his own country of Midian (*Holy Bible RSV*, Exodus 18:27).

Furthermore, during the Jewish journey in the wilderness, the Bible wrote of the manna and quail from heaven and the water from the rock, all of which foreshadowed bread and wine (*Holy Bible RSV*, Exodus, 16-18). Manna is also known in Biblical tradition by poetic names such as "the grain of heaven" (Ps. 78:24), "the bread of the angels" (Psalms 78:25), and "bread from heaven" (Psalms 105:40). In the In the New Testament, manna is considered a type of the Eucharist (Catholic Bible Dictionary, p. 571), and in Jesus' bread of life discourse is the same (*Holy Bible RSV*, John 6:31-59).

When asked what sign Jesus would give to match that of manna in the wilderness, Jesus responded, Truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; My Father gives you the true bread from heaven... I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst... Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; the bread which I shall give for the world's life is my flesh (Catholic Bible Dictionary, 2009, pp. 571–572).

All these passages, among many others, are types or prefigurations of the Eucharist in Old Testament scripture (Langeh, 2018). In 1984, a Jewish scholar named Baruch Bokser summarized recent research and concluded that "the current state of scholarship tends to argue against the identification of the Last Supper as a Seder." New Testament authors, however, did not seem to harbor any doubt (Hahn, 2018, p.62).

Skeptics often tag the Gospel according to St. Mark as the earliest and most reliable of the Gospels, and it is unmistakable in its testimony. The Apostle further states in chapter 14, verse 12 that the

Last Supper occurs "on the first day of unleavened bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb" (Hahn, 2018).

New Testament scripture further relates that Christ's death and resurrection occurred during the Passover observance, and the Gospels depict Jesus as the new Passover lamb. We also find an account of the Eucharist being instituted at the Last Supper, which served as a memorial of Christ's Passover (*Holy Bible RSV*, Matthew 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-20; John 13:1-30).

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke present the Last Supper in strikingly similar ways. They tend to parallel their accounts of all the events in Jesus' ministry. Therefore, scholars refer to the first three Gospels as the *Synoptic Gospels*, from a Greek word that means "seeing together." When they differ, it is usually because one evangelist's account includes or omits details that the others do not (Hahn, 2018, p. 63).

The day of the Passover meal in the Gospel account is one of those items. All four Gospels agree that Jesus died on a Friday and was laid in the tomb throughout the Sabbath. On Sunday, the tomb was discovered to be empty (*Holy Bible RSV*, Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 23:1; John 20:1).

It would appear, however, that there is a disagreement between John and the *Synoptic Gospels* as to whether that Friday was Passover (John) or not (*Synoptic Gospels*). The *Synoptic Gospels* stated that. Jesus celebrated Passover with his disciples (*Holy Bible RSV*, Matt 26:17-20; Mark 14:12-17; Luke 22:7-15) and died the following afternoon (*Holy Bible RSV*, Matthew 27:45; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44).

However, John said that Jesus died on the afternoon before Passover, noting that Jewish officials could not enter the Roman Praetorium for fear of becoming unclean (*Holy Bible RSV*, John 18:28; 19:14, 42). Then again, Passover appears on Thursday night in the Synoptics, but on Friday night in John (*Catholic Bible Dictionary*, 2009).

Nevertheless, Gospel accounts include the "words of the institution" of the Eucharist by Jesus on the night before his Crucifixion, which were reported in the *Synoptic Gospels*. According to Gospel

accounts, Jesus established the liturgical practice of the Eucharist in a traditional Passover manner, with Christ blessing the bread, which he said was his body, and sharing it with his disciples. He then shared a cup of wine with his disciples and told them, "This is the blood of my covenant, which is poured out for many" (Holy Bible RSV, Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:17-20). St. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians also carries the same liturgical theme (*Holy Bible RSV*, 1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

Alongside the four Gospel accounts, the scripture also encompasses the version provided by St. Paul to the believers in Corinth. His account in 1 Corinthians presumably acknowledges the Passover link to the Last Supper as depicted in the Gospels. His testimony may confirm a widely recognized form of the Eucharist that was utilized, distinct from the more commonly observed Passover tradition (Jefford, 2015).

In chapter 10 of his initial letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul articulated this sacrifice that connects the Priesthood of the circumcised with the ministerial Priesthood lineage of Aaron. He evidently had a Christian Priesthood in consideration when He referred to the Christian Eucharist as a sacrifice. Within the most Holy Eucharist, Jesus, the high Priest and victim, merges the Priesthood of the baptized in sacrifice with the Priesthood of the order of Melchizedek, as stated by the author of the letter to the Hebrews (*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*, 1 Corinthians 10).

Likewise, the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible Commentary* explained Eucharistic overtones in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 10, as supernatural food, or the manna rained down upon Israel as bread from heaven (Ex 16:4-31). It also foreshadows the living bread of the Eucharist, which nourishes us in the wilderness of this life (Hahn, 2010; *Ignatius Study Bible Commentar*y, 1 Cor 10:16; Jn 6:31-35).

In the scripture, the supernatural rock was mentioned as the rock of Horeb that gushed forth drinking water for Israel by the miracle of Moses (Exodus 17:6). Jewish tradition believed that the rock followed Israel as a constant source of refreshment on the march through the desert. It is ultimately a type of Christ, who pours out the living waters of the spirit in baptism (*Holy Bible RSV*, 1 Corinthians 12:13;

Jn 4:14), and the Sacramental gift of himself in the Eucharist (Hahn, 2010; *Ignatius Study Bible Commentary,* 1 Corinthians 10:16; Jn 6:53).

The Eucharist as a Sacrament and Sacrifice

The Church honors the Eucharist as one of her most exalted mysteries; yet, for sublimity and incomprehensibility, it yields nothing to the allied mysteries of the Trinity and Incarnation. Nevertheless, these three celebrations constitute a wonderful triad, an essential characteristic of Christianity (Pohle, 1911).

Moreover, the Eucharist has been defined as a sacrifice by Pope Gregory the Great, and the early Western Church used the expression of the breaking of bread (fractio panis) or liturgy. Worthy of note, in the Greek or Eastern Orthodox Church had used the latter name for almost sixteen centuries, “if anyone saith that in the Mass a true and proper sacrifice is not offered to God; or that to be offered is nothing else, but that Christ is given us to eat; let him be anathema” (Pohle, 1911). This concept of the Mass as a sacrifice by St. Gregory became the standard doctrine of the Latin Church until the Protestant Reformation rejected it in the sixteenth century. Here, the Lord's Supper of the Eucharist, which the early Church viewed as a sacrificial remembrance meal, became the enactment of a sacrifice (Sungenis, 2009, p. 231).

Quotations from several early Church Fathers confirmed that the Eucharist sacrifice was given to humanity by Christ, and not as some innovation from the Middle Ages. For example, at the end of the 1st century, St. Ignatius of Antioch, a disciple of the Apostle John, wrote of the heretics who were plaguing the Church in his day, "they abstained from the Eucharist because they do not confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our savior, Jesus Christ" (Sungenis, 2009, p. 235).

St. Justin Martyr, an apologist from the 2nd century, stated that the Eucharist elements are not merely everyday bread and standard drink. But since Christ, in having been made flesh by the word of God, as He told the Jews in John 6:49-50,

Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; the bread I shall give for the world's life is my flesh (*Holy Bible RSV*).

Likewise, had St. Justin taught that the food, which is blessed by the prayer of His words of institution, is changed by the flesh and blood of Jesus. The use of this theological doctrine continued through the 4th Century. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, another Church Father, wrote that the bread and wine of the Eucharist are the blood and body of Christ: "Do not, therefore, regard the bread and wine as simply that, for they are, according to the master's declaration, the body and blood of Christ. Even though the senses suggest the other, let faith make you firm" (Sungenis, 2009, p. 220).

History has recorded that the faithful always considered it a sacrifice in the early Church worship service, or Mass. The renowned non-Catholic scholar, Kelly, wrote, "the Eucharist was also, of course, the great act of worship of Christians, their sacrifice. The writers and liturgies of the period are unanimous in recognizing it as such" (Kelly, 1978, p. 214).

Kelly goes on to make a further point: "Eucharistic teaching, it should be understood at the outset, was in general unquestioningly realist, i.e., the consecrated bread and wine were taken to be, and were treated and designated as, the savior's body and blood." In essence, the Liturgical Church, or Sacramental Church, has two parts, the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the Eucharist as defined and explained at length in the Catechism of the Catholic Church: part 2, section 2 (Kelly, 1978, p. 440).

Therefore, the traditional Catholic view of the Eucharist is both a Sacrament and a Sacrifice in which the Lord Jesus Christ not only establishes a covenant but is the covenant. Moreover, the Sacrament contains our Lord Jesus Christ's body, blood, soul, and divinity; it is also an offering. So, in the Eucharist, Christ's body, blood, soul, and Divinity are offered to God the Father continually in an unbloody manner, the Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that Communion in the Divine life and that

unity of the people of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination of God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and the worship men offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit (Catholic Catechism, 1997, Sect. 1325).

Regarding the sacred scripture, this memorial is not merely the recollection of past events, but the proclamation of the mighty works wrought by God for humanity. In the liturgical celebration of these events, they become, in a certain way, present and real. This is how Israel understood its liberation from Egypt. Every time a Passover is celebrated, the Exodus events are present in the believers' memory so they may conform accordingly (Catholic Catechism, 1997, Sect . 1363).

As such, the Eucharist is a true sacrifice, not just a commemorative meal, as Protestant Christians insist. The original Christians knew it was a sacrifice and proclaimed this in their writings. They recognized the sacrificial character of Jesus' instruction, "do this in remembrance of me" (*Holy Bible, RSV*, Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24-25).

Moreover, Kelly wrote that in the early Church, "the Eucharist was regarded as the distinctively Christian sacrifice." Malachi's prediction (1:10-11) that the Lord would reject Jewish sacrifices and instead would have "a pure offering," made to him, by the Gentiles, in every place, was seized upon by Christians as a prophecy of the Eucharist. The *Didache* indeed actually applies the term thusia, or a sacrifice to the Eucharist, and it was natural for early Christians to think of the Eucharist as a sacrifice. The fulfillment of prophecy demanded a solemn Christian offering, and the rite was wrapped in the sacrificial atmosphere with which our Lord invested the Last Supper. The words of institution, do this' (touto poieite), must have been charged with sacrificial overtones for second-century ears; Justin at any rate, understood them to mean, offer this.'...The bread and wine, moreover, are offered 'for a memorial (eis anamnasin) of the passion,' a phrase which, given his identification of them with the Lord's body and blood, implies much more than an act of purely spiritual recollection (Kelly, 1978, pp. 196-7).

Additionally, by using the Greek word anamnesis, which is usually translated as remembrance in

In English, it conveys a meaning that goes beyond the modern sense of the word remembering. Anamnesis means that the past event itself is made present here and now. In truth, Christians today enact the Lord's Supper in a manner that has the form of active re-presentation as the action of Jesus and his disciples. This idea was also deeply embedded into the consciousness of the Hebrew people, like when they celebrated the Passover. They initially understood that they shared that redemptive act, which is not made present to them today. In support of this belief, anamnesis is one of the sacrificial terms used in the Septuagint version (*Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 1971, Vol. 3, p. 236).

The connection between anamnesis and sacrifice is made even stronger when looking at the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Especially important to this point is that no Greek word was used during the Last Supper, which refers to a common remembrance of the event. However, they use nine different Greek words, one of which refers to some remembrance with an exclusively sacrificial connotation: anamnesis (Sungenis, 2009).

In contrast, during a worship service of the Protestant Church, they experience only a liturgy centered on sacred scripture and preaching, like the first part of the Catholic Mass. In short, Protestant denominations do not view their Church services as a sacrifice. Some have historically taken a much different view on the Eucharist, like that of reformer Zwingli, who summarized his understanding of the Eucharist; "we believe that Christ is truly present in the Lord's Supper; yea, we believe that there is no Communion without the presence of Christ... but that his body is eaten is far from the truth and the nature of faith" (Schaff, 1878, Vol. 1, p. 375).

Though a reformer, Martin Luther did not agree with other Protestant leaders. He insisted on the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine, which he called the Sacramental union. His Eucharistic theology was not identical to Catholic theology, but was far closer than today's symbolic view. He thought Jesus' body and blood were present alongside the bread and wine (consubstantiation) after consecration. In essence, Jesus was not there, but the bread and wine were, in

contrast to Catholic theology, in which the bread and wine remain after the consecration (Armstrong, 2017).

Whereas Calvin stressed the literal human body of Jesus in heaven, when he wrote in his *Institutes* (IV, 17, 12), for as we do not doubt that Christ's body is limited by the general characteristics common to all human bodies and is contained in heaven (where it was once for all received) until Christ return in judgment, so we deem it utterly unlawful to draw it back under these corruptible elements or to imagine it to be present everywhere (Pohle, 1911, Catholic Encyclopedia).

It is unfortunate today that some rabid anti-Catholic authors, such as Loraine Boettner, go beyond just a theological disagreement, and make their point by spreading a false understanding of the liturgical Mass, "the Church of Rome holds that the Mass is a continuation of the sacrifice that Christ made on Calvary [true], that it is in reality a re-Crucifixion [not true] of our Lord over and over again, in an unbloody manner" (Boettner, 1962, p. 174).

The truth is easily demonstrated when Catholic views are adequately documented and presented. The sacrifice of Christ and the Sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice, the victim is the same: the same now offers through the ministry of Priests, who then offered Himself on the Cross; only the manner of offering is different... and since in this Divine sacrifice, which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the Cross is contained and is presented in an unbloody manner... this sacrifice is truly propitiatory (Catholic Catechism, 1997, sect. 1367).

A critical point must be made about an unbloody sacrifice, like when Christ's death is reenacted. In short, what is being referred to is not a bloody sacrifice in which Christ is still bleeding and is still dying on Calvary. No, He is not dying again; He has been buried. In truth, He has been raised and has ascended. In the New Testament, the memorial takes on new meaning, like when the Church celebrates the Eucharist, which commemorates Christ's Passover and is made present in the Sacrifice Christ offered.

This was done once and for all, and the Cross remains ever present, "as often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed' is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out" (*Catholic Catechism*, 1997, Sect. 1264).

Because Christ, after His resurrection, resides in heaven, He does not suffer repeatedly, though some Protestants incorrectly assume that the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary is never-ending. Sacred scripture and Apostolic tradition teach that Christ's suffering ended at His death and resurrection. The point is that Christ's sacrifice and surrender to God the Father continue in eternity, because the nature of His Priesthood is eternal. Therefore, He is the victim, and the Priest coexists eternally. What the Church believes Christ is an eternal Melchizedek; His Priesthood and His kingship are one. The Book of Hebrews, the sixth chapter, verses 19 and 20, supports this view, "we have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine beyond the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Hahn, 2010, *The Meal of Melchizedek; Holy Bible RSV*).

Moreover, the sacred scripture draws a sharp contrast between the Levitical high Priest of the Old Testament, who entered the Holy of Holies through the curtain with the blood of the sacrifice, and Jesus, who entered into the heavenly Holy of Holies through the curtain of death to mediate on our behalf continually. The author of Hebrews introduces blood into the text to show its ritual connection with the forgiveness of sin (Pohle, 1911).

The sacred scripture contrasts the old covenant's blood sacrifices and the new covenant's sacrifice, as the Hebrews knew, "this is the blood of the covenant which God commanded you." In essence, the Priests sprinkled their tents and all their vessels used in worship with blood. Indeed, under the law everything was purified with blood, because without the shedding of blood there was no forgiveness of sins, "through His sacrifice Christ has entered into His sanctuary, not into a sanctuary made with hands, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (Holy Bible RSV, Hebrews

9:20-22, 24). The unknown author of Hebrews demonstrates that Christ had become the high Priest who presided over a bloodless sacrifice through the greater and more perfect tent or the temple (Hahn, 2010, The Meal of Melchizedek).

The Book of Hebrews continues in chapter nine to speak of the superiority of this new covenant. The ninth verse reads, "according to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices were offered which cannot perfect the worshiper's conscience." The book implies that Israel's sacrifices could not perfect the worshiper's standing before the Lord. However, the verse and chapter insinuate that the new covenant is a sacrifice to perfect the worshiper's state of grace (Hahn, 2010, *The Meal of Melchizedek; Holy Bible RSV*).

The verses cited in Hebrews, chapter nine, show that Jesus' Priestly sacrifice is eternally active in his offering, not in his suffering. It is not just eternal in its effects. In the first verse of chapter 5, the Priesthood is defined in terms of sacrifice: "For every high Priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men about God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins." The sacrifice of Christ was not an event that occurred once in time and is finished (*Holy Bible RSV*, Hebrews 5:1 9).

Most interestingly, Thompson stated, "there is a permanence to the crucified lamb that cannot be captured by locating the Crucifixion in time, for example 'under Pontius Pilate' or 'in the first century of the common era." To put it differently, the Crucifixion is much more than a momentary event in history. That permanence is captured in the *Book of Revelation* through spatial, not temporal, imagery.
The slain lamb appears not only on earth, but also in heaven, close to the throne" (Thompson, 1990, p. 85).

Moreover, to paraphrase the *Catholic Catechism*, the sacrifice of Christ is not finished. It is perpetual, and his Church continues offering it forever with Christ through the Cross and the Eucharist. Not the bloody animal sacrifices, but our hearts and our souls and our bodies in union with the one, whose body and blood, soul and divinity are perfect and pure; and the only acceptable sacrifice, which makes

humanity otherwise an unacceptable sacrifice perfectly satisfactory, "Holy and righteous," as St. Paul stated in Romans 12.1 (*Catholic Catechism*, 1997, Sect. 1382).

Through his resurrection, Christ, with the help of the Holy Spirit, makes himself available, as the lamb of God, to be consumed unceasingly, and that was the whole focus of his resurrection. The Holy Spirit raises the body of Christ. It glorifies it so supernaturally that the body and blood are glorified. Moreover, that body may be distributed throughout time by the Bishops and Priests of His Church, so that all of God's faithful can find security in God's new covenant through the sacrifice of Christ. Christ did not die again; He is not bleeding, and He is not suffering anymore. He is reigning in glory and giving us his flesh and blood (Hahn, 2001, *Eucharist, Holy Meal)*.

Some have argued that the Mass cannot be a legitimate sacrifice because the Lord's blood is not shed. This conclusion is defective for two reasons. First, the sacrifice of the Mass is not a standalone act apart from Christ's passion and death, but its re-presentation. Nevertheless, in section 1367 of the *The Catholic Catechism* states that the Sacrifice of Christ and the Sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice: 'the victim is the same: the same now offers through the ministry of Priests, who then offered Himself on the Cross; only the manner of offering is different.' 'And since in this Divine Sacrifice, which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered Himself once in a bloody manner on the altar Of the Cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner... this sacrifice is truly propitiatory.'

Secondly, not all legitimate sacrifices are bloody. Yet, the sacred scripture maintained, "and by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10). And in Romans 12:1, St. Paul declared, "I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, Holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." St. Peter also wrote in 1 Peter 2:5, "and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a Holy Priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." This

is achieved by our surrendering to Christ, in his sacrifice, that is made present at every Mass (*Holy Bible RSV,* 1) (Peter 2:5).

To better address this issue and fully understand Christ's eternal sacrifice, one must broaden one's understanding of time. A fuller understanding can be accomplished by differentiating between chronological and Kairotic times, as in sacred scripture (Saunders, 2003).

Chronos refers to the Bible's past, present, and future chronological time. Explicit activities have a beginning and an endpoint. Kairos or Kairotic time refers to God's eternal time, time of the present moment, which recapitulates the entire past and contains the whole future. Kairos can be defined as "the appointed time in the purpose of God," or the time when God acts (*Holy Bible RSV*, Mark 1:15). Or better yet, the Kairos is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Most importantly, Kairos was used 86 times in the New Testament (*Strong's Greek Concordance*, 2022).

Therefore, while our Lord's saving event occurred chronologically, about 33 AD, in the Kairotic sense of time, it is an ever-present reality that transcends time and space, touching the faithful here and now. For the same reason, therefore, through the Sacraments of Baptism, the faithful share in the mystery of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection; though chronologically that happened almost 2000 years ago, it is still successful today (Saunders, 2003).

Moreover, when a priest or bishop consecrates the Eucharist, the fact is that it is Jesus Christ who consecrates it. However, there should be no confusion about Jesus not consecrating the Eucharist repeatedly. Christ consecrated the Eucharist only once, and that was at the Last Supper. He is the second person of the Godhead and is beyond time. At the Last Supper, He consecrated the Eucharist in a way that is both beyond time and place, as well as throughout time and place, no matter wherever and whenever a Mass is celebrated (Pohle, 1901).

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), writing for the Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff, about a Priest and canon of a Mass, stated, in order that an event

that occurred in the past is made present, the words must therefore be pronounced: This is my body—this is my blood. However, in these words, it is assumed that the I of Jesus Christ speaks; only he can say these things; they are his words. No man can pretend to declare the I of Jesus Christ as his own. No one can say that many communities can transmit; rather, it can only be founded on the 'Sacramental' authorization given to the whole Church by Jesus Christ himself (Ratzinger, 1998).

Within the Celtic Church of Ireland and Scotland, sacred space and time are given the designation of thin places. Places or times, like in the Mass at the words of institution, the barrier between the material world and the world of God becomes so thin that we can experience the presence of the Divine (Martos, 2001).

In Persona Christi

By using the Sacrament of Holy Orders, which the Priest shares, through the Priesthood of Jesus, he acts in the person of Christ through his piety. This theological premise of the Priest becomes clearer when he offers the sacrifice of the Mass or Eucharist. In persona Christi is a Latin phrase meaning, in the person of Christ, an essential view in Catholicism and, in varying degrees, within other Christian traditions, such as Lutheranism and Anglicanism (Schall, 2009).

The doctrine of in persona Christi affects the liturgical practice. When a Priest speaks to the congregation, in persona Christi, the words they say are the words of God to the Church, rather than the words of humans to God. In support of this view, Ratzinger wrote, " Here... he acts 'in persona Christi.' Because of this, he does not say in the plural, May the omnipotent God bless us,' or 'The Mass is ended, let us go in peace.' He speaks in the name of the person of Christ and as minister of the Church, because of this he imparts the blessing, while invoking it... 'may God bless you' and 'go in peace' (Ratzinger, 2010).

For a Priest, the chief communal act of worship is the offering and consecration of sacrifices on behalf of the congregation. In the Old Testament, the Levitical Priests offered animal sacrifices. In the

New Testament's new covenant, Priests offer the living Christ the unbloody sacrifice to God. This is still a doctrine of the Catholic Church, by way of ordained Priests, who can preside at the Eucharist and consecrate the bread and the wine, so that they become the body and blood of the Lord (*Catholic Catechism*, 1997, Sect. 1411).

Scripturally and historically, God required a special tribe, drawn only from the Levitical Priesthood, to perform the animal sacrifices. How much more should be expected? Is a specialist needed to perform a role in the eternal offering of Christ's sacrifice? Likewise, the Latin Rite Church codifies the Priest as the only person who can preside over the sacrifice of the Mass by using the words of institution, "it is Christ himself, the eternal High Priest of the New Covenant, who, acting through the ministry of the Priests, offers the Eucharistic sacrifice. Moreover, it is the same Christ, really present under the species of bread and wine, who is the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice" (*Catholic Catechism*, 1997, Sect. 1410).

This is even more apparent when one considers the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The spiritual and physical issues that would result, especially if anyone could consecrate the elements, St. Paul had to address this issue at the Church of Corinth, as found in 1 Corinthians 11:27-30. In short, the Corinthians were offending Christ in the Eucharist, so their carelessness before the Sacrament triggered divine judgments of sickness and even death (Hahn, 2010; *Holy Bible RSV*).

Bishops did not ordain the original Apostles, but Christ Himself. According to the sacred scripture, Jesus chose, ordained, and commissioned them. St. Matthew states that Christ "called to himself" or "summoned" the twelve disciples (*Holy Bible RSV,* Matthew 10:1-2). The word Apostles, or by the Greek word Apostolos, means, "one who is sent forth" (*Holy Bible RSV,* Matthew 10:5), who is invested with the authority of the sender (Hahn, 2010; Holy Bible RSV, Matthew 10: 1-2); and since those twelve disciples were sent by Christ, the term, in persona Christi, is wholly appropriate for Bishops and through them the Priest.

In chapter 6, verse 13, St. Luke's account says that Christ "called to himself," his disciples and "chose from them twelve, whom also he named Apostles." St. Mark's Gospel reads in 3:14, "and he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils" (*Holy Bible RSV).*

In the Gospel of St. John, chapter 20, verses 21 through 23, Jesus told them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." Moreover, when he had said this, he breathed on them, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (*Holy Bible RSV).* In truth, in his commentary in the Ignatius Catholic Study Bible, New Testament, Hahn wrote that we see that the risen humanity of Jesus has become a Sacrament of the Divine Spirit (6:5358; CCC 1116). John used an expression that recurs in significant contexts in the Greek OT. It appears in Gen 2:7, where the Lord breathes life into Adam; in 1 Kings 17:21, where the Greek version specifies that Elijah resuscitated a boy with his breath; and in Ezekiel 37:9, where God raises an army of corpses to new life by the breath of the spirit (Hahn, 2010, Ignatius Catholic Study Bible).

There is no question that the view among Catholic, Orthodox, or Celtic Churches is that the Apostles chose and ordained Matthias and the other Apostles. Scriptural accounts of the Apostles stated that Christ had ordained them, who would continue to ordain worthy men to carry on the Apostolic and Priestly lines. Moreover, they strove to maintain their number of 12 intact, and ordained others, such as Matthias in Acts 1:15-26; later, they expanded through Paul and Barnabas' ordination in Galatians 1:18-19. The Apostles were critical of the organization and preservation of the Church (Hahn, 2010, *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible Commentaries on Matthew, Acts, and Galatians*).

It should also be noted that the clergy are a Sacramental order of the sacred scripture and teach that their ordinations always include a laying on of hands. In Acts 6:6, the Apostles pray and lay hands upon them. In 2 Timothy 1:6, St. Paul reminded Timothy that he was made a bishop by the imposition of

St. Paul's hands (1 Timothy 4:4), and he continued to exhort Timothy to appoint presbyters by the same manner in 1 Timothy 5:22 (*Holy Bible RSV).*

Given what has been cited above and additional scriptural support, it may be fully explained why the Catholic understanding of the Priest's place in the sacrifice of the Mass. First, after their initial calling, Christ ordained and commissioned the Apostles on Holy Thursday to celebrate a memorial reenactment of when Jesus commanded them. In Luke 22:19, He said, "Do this in remembrance of me," which parallels St. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 11:24 (*Holy Bible RSV).*

With those words, Christ ordained them as Priests to offer the Eucharist as a sacrifice. This is important because, to a first-century Jew, only a Priest can offer a sacrifice. If Christ tells his Apostles to "do this," and if the words have a peculiarly sacrificial meaning, then he is making them Priests. In essence, he is ordaining them. Regarding early Christian doctrines, historian Kelly wrote that it was natural for early Christians to think of the Eucharist as a sacrifice. The fulfillment of prophecy demanded a solemn Christian offering, and the rite was wrapped in the sacrificial atmosphere with which our Lord invested the Last Supper. The words of institution, do this' (touto poieite), must have been charged with sacrificial overtones for second-century ears; Justin, at any rate, understood them to mean, offer this.' . . . . The bread and wine, moreover, are offered 'for a memorial (eis anamnasin) of the passion,' a phrase which, given his identification of them with the Lord's body and blood, implies much more than an act of purely spiritual recollection (Kelly, 1978, pp. 196-197).

The first Christians understood the Eucharist in this manner; we know this from the *Didache* and the teachings of the twelve Apostles. Scholars have depicted it as anything between the original of the Apostolic decree, circa 50 AD, and somewhere around the early second century. For in the Eucharist Mass, it states that the assembly on the Lord's Day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist; but first confess your faults, so that your sacrifice may be pure. Anyone who differs from his fellow is not to take part with you until he has been reconciled to avoid profanation in your sacrifice [Matt. 5:23 24]. For this

is the offering the Lord has said, ‘everywhere and always bring me an undefiled sacrifice, for I am a great king, says the Lord, and my name is the wonder of nations (Didache, 60, Second Section - the Sacrifice).

It cannot be overstated that a sacrifice is the act of a Priest alone. We find within the Old Covenant that the Levitical Priests offered an unblemished lamb as a sacrifice. So, in the new covenant, the Priests offered Christ as the lamb, unblemished by sin, as a sacrificial offering for sin. When Christ said to his Apostles at the Last Supper, “Do this” (touto poieite), He used these words for the sacrifice. Moreover, the Greek text of Exodus was also used to describe the act of a Priest (Kelly, 1978, pp. 197- 198).

Therefore, by laying on hands, the liturgical Church continued that unbroken line of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. The earliest account of the trifold clergy is found in the Book of Acts, chapter 6, verses 2 4-6. Moreover, the twelve summoned the body of the disciples and said, It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint to this duty... These they set before the Apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands upon them (Holy Bible RSV, Acts 6:2, 4-6).

Scriptural evidence continued in the 14th Chapter of Acts, verse 24, “and when they had appointed elders for them in every Church, with prayer and fasting, they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed,” and then scripture was found to caution others on how to appoint men. Furthermore, 1 Timothy 5:22 wrote, “do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor participate in another man’s sins; keep yourself pure.” St. Paul wrote of the qualifications for the Holy Orders, which are found in the book of 1 Timothy, 3rd chapter, verses 1-13. Moreover, in his *Summa Theologica*, third part, question 82, “the minister of this Sacrament... article 1” stated, “whether the consecration of this Sacrament belongs to a Priest alone” (*Holy Bible RSV).*

St. Thomas answered that such is the dignity of this Sacrament that it is performed only as in the person of Christ. Now, whoever performs any act in another's stead must do so by the power bestowed by such a one. However, as the power of receiving this Sacrament is conceded by Christ to the baptized

person, so likewise the power of consecrating this Sacrament on Christ's behalf is bestowed upon the Priest at his ordination: for thereby he is put upon a level with them to whom the Lord said (Luke 22:19), 'do this for a commemoration of Me.' Therefore, it must be noted that it belongs to the Priests to accomplish this Sacrament (St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1265, Third Part).

St. Thomas goes on to further explain in "reply to objection 1" in the same section, the Sacramental power is in several things, and not merely in one; thus, the power of baptism lies both in the words and in the water. Accordingly, the consecrating power is not simply in the words, but likewise in the power delivered to the Priest in his consecration and ordination, when the bishop says to him: 'Receive the power of offering up the sacrifice in the Church for the living as well as for the dead.' For instrumental power lies in several instruments through which the chief agent acts (St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1265, Third Part).

Christ never authored any books, but He did proclaim His teachings using preaching and ritual action, and He appointed His Apostles, who did the same in perpetuity. As far as it is known, Christ never gave instructions about writing anything. However, He did tell them to preside over his memorial sacrifice found in Luke 22:19; He also told them to preach, baptize, and make disciples in Matthew 28:19 (Hahn, 2013, p. 48; *Holy Bible RSV*).

Likewise, St. Paul proclaimed the Gospel without the benefit of any written Gospels. His writings include a ministry of public preaching and the Eucharistic liturgy, which could not have happened apart from a preexisting Church with duly appointed ministers. It was through the ministry of the Church that God did the calling, sending, and preaching. Therefore, it was through the Church that Christ's ministry was established using the sacrifice, and a sacrifice always requires an officiating Priest (Hahn, 2013, p. 49).

Eucharistic Prayers

The focus of this thesis is not a historical account of the early Church's liturgical forms and norms. However, it would be remiss if this work did not touch upon the early formation and compare them to some of the liturgies and prayers used today. At the heart of the Eucharist stands the great prayer of thanksgiving, in which the offerings of bread and wine are consecrated as the body and blood of Christ. Scholars continue to write and debate the location, dating, and possibly the earliest text of the Eucharistic prayers that are thought to have originated in the East. Most likely in Antioch, well before the Constantinian period (Drimbe, 2018, p .22).

Scripturally, the Eucharistic prayers and practices are found in St. Paul's instructions on the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 and the words of institution in the Gospels. Like when St. Paul responded to reports that groups of Corinthian Christians ate without waiting for all to gather for the blessings over the bread and wine, among other issues. Here, St. Paul appealed to the tradition he had already delivered, as he recounts the words and actions of Jesus at the Last Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23, "that the Lord Jesus, the night he was betrayed." He also commanded them in 1 Corinthians 11:26, that they repeated it as a memorial that the Church does to celebrate the redemptive work of Christ. This is, he said, "showing forth of the Lord's death until he comes again" (Sungenis, 2009; *Holy Bible RSV*).

St. Paul recognized the Last Supper tradition as an indication that the death of Jesus was a new Passover sacrifice found in 1 Corinthians, chapter 5, verses 7 and 8. From the outset of chapter five, an interchange exists between the love feast, or meal, leading up to the Sacrament. When examined, the text precisely indicates the interchange and the distinctions of St. Paul's words that led to the assumption that he is referring to consecrated elements, for example, in 1 Corinthians 11 verse 26, he said, "for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." In essence, St. Paul explained to the Corinthians that the words of consecration are not mere bread for a meal but have become the body of the Lord (Sungenis, 2009; *Holy Bible RSV*).

It is unclear when, or under what circumstances, the Eucharistic blessings became detached from the love feast, actual meal, or when the faithful gathered for the Eucharist on the morning of the Lord's Day. The writings of Clement and Ignatius commonly state that the responsibility of the Eucharist blessing is to be that of the elders or Bishops (*Encyclopedic Dictionary of Bible and Theology*, 2022).

Many of the earliest post-Biblical accounts of Christian worship services describe a liturgy as an actual meal in absentia. According to Justin Martyr's first apology, the Christian services began with a scripture reading, a sermon, and a prayer. After which, the bread and wine were brought, prayed over, and distributed to the faithful. The Eucharistic bread and cup are well defined, but the agape meal is nowhere to be found (Pursiful, 2008).

Most importantly, Pursiful quoted St. Justin's first apology 67. In his article, he wrote, "and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying amen." He further cited that the Apostolic tradition describes the entire presbytery as concelebrating with the bishop by laying their hands on the Eucharistic elements while the bishop prayed. Pursiful went on to state that "the Eucharistic prayer was as much the work of the bishop or presiding minister as the homily," and it was only in Emperor Justinian's era, circa 535, that the set wording was finally executed (Pursiful, 2006, *Ancient Christian Worship*).

However, the earliest Christian Eucharistic prayer outside the scriptures was found in the *Didache*, 60 AD to 120 AD. It is relatively short and clearly of Jewish origin. Furthermore, it does not contain the words of Jesus from the Gospel's Last Supper. Still, it is a written prayer of thanksgiving that the Eucharist, as a ritual, continues from the Apostolic age, and we see the record of it being performed in the early Church, which eventually developed in terms of structure and liturgy. Up to about 300 AD, one general observation was that Eucharistic prayers were relatively diverse, brief, and not oriented around a historical recitation of salvation history. However, through the fifth century, Eucharistic prayers were found to be more uniform, longer, and historically oriented (Pursiful, 2006).

Concerning the Eucharist, thus shall you give thanks: 'We give thee thanks, our Father, for the Holy Vine of David thy child, which thou hast made known to us through Jesus thy child; to thee be the glory forever'. Moreover, of the broken bread: 'We give thee thanks, our Father, for the life and knowledge which thou hast made known to us through Jesus thy child; to thee be glory forever. As this broken bread was dispersed over the mountains, and being collected became one, so may thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom, for thine is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever… Most of all, we thank you for being powerful. Yours is the glory unto ages of ages. Remember, Lord, your Church, deliver it from all evil and perfect it in thy love. Gather the sanctified one together from the four winds into your kingdom, which you have prepared for it. For yours is the power and the glory unto ages of ages' (Didache, 60, Section 2).

Moreover, evidence concerning the Eucharistic practices of the Eastern Mediterranean area of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem noted that the Eucharist was also used during the public liturgy of the Christian Roman Empire. One of those pieces of evidence was a prayer book from the Alexandrian Rite of St. Mark, which was associated with Bishop Serapion of Thumris, who corresponded with St Athanasius. This book describes the prayers to be used at the reading of the scriptures, the homily, the dismissal of the catechumens, and the prayers of the people. It was also used as the Eucharist, the breaking of the bread, and the manner to receive Communion (*Encyclopedic Dictionary of Bible and Theology*, 2022).

Other rituals and prayers from the early Church, including the writings of Ignatius, Clement, and Polycarp, help inform followers today about the origins of the Eucharist and its meaning. The entire Eucharistic prayer is an invocation of consecration and thanksgiving, ending in the doxology, the words of intercession, all of which are central and deserve our attention (Pursiful, 2008).

The epiclesis, a Greek term meaning invocation or prayer, speaks directly to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It has been associated with the invocation of the Holy Spirit on the Eucharistic bread and

wine in the anaphora to petition the fruits of Communion (*Encyclopedic Dictionary of Bible and Theology*, 2022).

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* (1909) defines epiklesis (Latin for invocation) as the name of a prayer that occurs in all Eastern and Western Church liturgies after the words of institution. These were used as celebrant prayers in which God sent down His Holy Spirit to change the bread and wine into the body and blood of His son (Fortescue, 1909, *Catholic Encyclopedia).* In the Latin Rite Eucharistic Prayer Rite II, it stated, "make Holy, therefore, these gifts, we pray, by sending down your spirit upon them like the dewfall, so that they may become for us the body + and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ" (Magnificat, 2022, p. 223).

Likewise, in Latin Rite Eucharistic Prayer II, it maintained, "therefore, O Lord, we humbly implore you: by the same spirit graciously make Holy these gifts we have brought to you for consecration, that they may become the body and + blood of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ at whose command we celebrate these mysteries" (Magnificat, 2022, p. 225).

Furthermore, the Celtic Rite Eucharistic prayer follows the same development as seen in Rite I prayer: "We beg you, O God, be pleased to send your Holy Spirit upon us, and upon this offering, to bless, consecrate, and approve it, making it reasonable and acceptable, so that it may become for us the body and blood of your most beloved son, our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Missal of the Celtic Catholic Church*, 2018).

One of the chief controversies between the Eastern and Western Churches is when the bread and wine are changed. The East has believed that the epiklesis, and not the words of institution, is the essential form, or at least the essential complement of the Sacrament. Throughout the history of the Church, Orthodox, Catholic, Latin, Celtic Rite, and Anglican scholars have argued about placing the epiclesis before or after the words of institution. Reasons for these shifts are undoubtedly worthy of in-depth scholarship and have been and are essential (*Encyclopedic Dictionary of Bible and Theology*, 2022).

The point of this position is that the Holy Spirit has been present throughout the liturgy of the

Eucharist and epiclesis are the points at which the Holy Spirit acts. It should also be noted that when the Priest, in persona Christi, invokes and calls down the Holy Spirit. He is sanctifying the bread and wine. According to a study of comparative religions, one of four things is necessary for a sacrifice of a sacrificing minister (minister legitimus), if the Mass is to be a true sacrifice in the literal sense, he must realize the philosophical conception of sacrifice. It is also worth noting that the celebrant's hands are placed over the bread and wine. Importantly, it is the priest's prayers and acts that call down the Holy Spirit; we may faithfully receive this Holy Sacrament (Fortescue, 1909; Pohle, 1911).

Real Presence

As with other Church teachings, their understanding and position of the Eucharist is a matter of tradition and scripture. Tradition is the living transmission and experience of the Catholic faith. It is that which is not recorded or written down but is instead passed on by faith through Christ's Apostles and eventually to His Church. Thus, in 1 Corinthians 11:2, St. Paul tells the Corinthians, "I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you;" and again when he told St. Timothy in 2 Timothy, chapter 2, verse 2, "what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (Selwood, 2010, p. 11; *Holy Bible RSV*).

While it is certain that Catholics draw upon various sources for the practice of the Eucharist, it should also be noted that it draws significantly from scripture with particular emphasis. Eucharistic words from the four New Testament traditions, like those of the Gospels in Mark 14:22-25, Matthew 26:26-29, Luke 22:17-20, and the epistle of St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. As well as the bread of life discourse in the Gospel of St. John, chapter 6, verses 48-68 (*Holy Bible RSV)*.

In truth, the latter plays a significant role in explaining the Gospel readings, which will be described later in this paper. Jesus' Eucharistic words explain His redemption plan, in which Spitzer explained that when He (Christ) says, 'this is my body which will be given up for you,' the Greek word

used to translate His Hebrew (zeh baśari) or Aramaic (den bisri) was sōma instead of sarx. Sarx means 'flesh' and would certainly refer to Jesus' corporeal body given on the Cross, while sōma is much broader and refers to the whole person (mind, soul, will, and corporeal body). Thus, sōma is much like the word 'body' in 'everybody' or 'somebody' in English. It might, therefore, be roughly translated as 'person' or 'self.' If we substitute the word 'self for 'body' in the Eucharistic words, we obtain 'this is my whole self-given up for you' (Spitzer, 2014, p. 2).

From the early history of Christianity, it must be made clear that Church teachings have always been made from a realist perspective. Moreover, early Church Fathers tried to comprehend and explain how Christ is present in the Eucharist elements. They used Gospel accounts and epistolic faith passed on by oral tradition (Selwood, 2010). Kelly, a Church historian, elaborated further, "Eucharistic teaching, it should be understood at the outset, was in general unquestionably realist, i.e., the consecrated bread and wine were taken to be, and were treated and designated as, the savior's body and blood" (Kelly, 1978, p. 440).

In both the Old Testament scriptures and through ancient Jewish traditions, history finds that the sacrifice of the Passover lamb was not completed simply by its death. The sacrifice was finished by completing the meal and eating the flesh of the lamb that had been slain. If it is understood that Christ knows himself to be the sacrificial lamb of the new covenant, it can be understood that He would speak of his blood being poured out and command his disciples to eat his flesh (Palm, 2010).

The theological issue of whether Jesus meant his words to be taken literally or only symbolically is not realistically a debatable issue. For example, when he used the words, "This is my body," it was not an early Christian issue; instead, it was not until the ninth century that controversy about the meaning of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist even arose (Guerrero, 2020, p. 6).

In other words, without a doubt, Christ knew full well what His first century hearers would have understood when it came to the Passover, “you did not only have to sacrifice the lamb in order to fulfill God’s law to be saved from their death, but you had to completely eat the lamb” (Pitre, 2016, p. 75).

Christ’s followers did not doubt the link between Jesus’ death as the lamb and the eating of his flesh at the Last Supper. The first Christians heard the words of the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, which said, “for Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival” (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

As mentioned previously, Christ instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and in doing so He fulfilled his promise made earlier in his public ministry to give himself as the “bread of life,” which was documented in St. John’s Gospel chapter 6, verses 26 through 59 (*Catholic Bible Dictionary*, 2009, p. 256).

In the context of John 6:53, John’s use of the term "sarx" (flesh) carries profound meaning when considered alongside John 1:14, where it states, "the Word became flesh" (Guerrero, 2020, p. 5). The discourse on the bread of life in this chapter plays a crucial role in affirming the reality of Christ's presence. Specifically, Jesus declares, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died; whoever eats this bread will live forever” (*Holy Bible RSV,* John 6:53-58).

In St. John 6:50-58, Jesus stated six times that His hearers must eat His flesh and drink His blood. His audience clearly understood Him and the literal connotation of His words. In fact, they were appalled by Jesus’s words. Yet Christ made no move to correct their understanding or reexplain Himself, but

reiterated His teaching more strongly. Elsewhere in the scriptures, when the disciples or others wrongly understood His statements or parables, Jesus explained His meaning to them as in John 3:1-15, Mark 4:34, and Matt 16:5-12, at the very least to His own disciples (Palm, 2010; *Holy Bible RSV*).

A separate account of the Eucharist, in the 6th chapter of St. John, is colored by the Gospel's incarnation of Christ. St. John introduced Jesus not as a baby in Bethlehem but as the eternal Word of God made flesh (Sungenis, 2009). Throughout John's Gospel, it was Jesus' Divine nature, which is often reflected in the Passover lamb correlation. In truth, in John 1:29, Jesus is called the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Moreover, while continuing to draw references to Jesus, He died roughly around the time of the Passover offerings and sacrifices in the Temple. And John 19:37 explained why Jesus' bones were not broken with the injunction against breaking bones of the Paschal offerings (*Holy Bible RSV,* Exodus 12:10; 12:46; Numbers 9:12); while John 6:51-58 presented Jesus's flesh and blood as the real food and drink (Nikkanen, 2018, p. 106; *Holy Bible RSV*).

Sungenis wrote that in verse 48 of St. John, Jesus set the stage for the point of His discourse. Despite Jewish objections, He restated, "I am the bread of life," which is the phrase He used in verse 35. In verse 51, Jesus stated His discourse about eating the bread. In His transition from the spiritual to physical partaking of Him, He said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread" (*Holy Bible RSV*, John 6:51; Sungenis, 2009).

It is at this point, "then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, 'how can this man give us his flesh to eat?'" The fact is that the Jews do not object to Jesus' mention of bread but to His mention of flesh. This point highlights the whole account, and Jesus only had two alternatives. He could have explained to himself that using bread and blood was an allegory, metaphor, or symbol, but He continued to stand on His statements (Sungenis, 2009).

Sungenis detailed this idea further when he said, Jesus continues to remove all reasonable doubts about His meaning in five more ways: (1) in vr. 53, He adds the command to 'drink his blood' and 'eat the

flesh,' and in doing so (2) changes the imagery of drinking spiritual water from vr. 35 into that of physically drinking His blood and (3) exchanges the word for 'eat' from one that could be interpreted either physically or symbolically to one in which the only meaning is physical; (4) He repeats this new verb form four more times in the following four verses (vrs. 54-58), thus reinforcing the command to eat him physically; (5) at the risk of losing his entire following, even his disciples and Apostles, He does not retract or soften His teaching (Sungenis, 2009, p. 148).

However, the Apostles, who would continue to carry on the traditions of the Church, responded differently. His disciples stated in John 6:61, "This saying is hard, and who can hear it?" Moreover, Christ responded when He asked in verse 67, "Will you also go away?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Christ would have allowed the Apostles to wander away like the rest of the crowd (Pohle, 1909; *Holy Bible RSV*).

It should be noted further that St. Paul drew a parallel to St. John's Gospel account, when he wrote to the faithful in the Corinthian Church, in 1 Corinthians 10:16, "the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? Is the bread which we break not a participation in the body of Christ?" As such, when Communion is given, the congregant participates in the body and blood of Christ, not just eating their symbols. St. Paul also wrote, "whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a man examine himself, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon himself" (*Holy Bible, RSV*, 1 Corinthians 11:27-29; Nikkanen, 2018).

This point is further explained by St. Paul (1 Corinthians 11:27 sq.), who, in the most vigorous language, brands the unworthy recipient as 'guilty of body and the blood of the Lord.' There can be no question of a grievous offense against Christ Himself unless we suppose that the actual body and the actual blood of Christ are present in the Eucharist. Further, if we attend only to the words themselves,

their natural sense is so forceful and clear that Luther wrote to the Christians of Strasburg in 1524: 'I am caught, I cannot escape, the text is too forcible' (Pohle, 1909*).*

In his book, *The Catholic Doctrine of Transubstantiation: An Exposition and Defense* (2010), Selwood referenced author Armstrong's argument about the belief in transformation, which had taken place during the consecration of the elements, and about the incarnate reality of the real presence of Christ. In essence, the argument is that if faithful Christians will accept that God became man and dwelt among us, then it should not be considered too impossible for Christ to be truly present under the appearances of bread and wine of the Eucharist. Considering that Christ, after his death and resurrection, according to sacred scriptures, could walk through walls while remaining touchable in his glorified body. How, then, can His real presence reasonably be regarded as implausible by any Protestant Christian (Armstrong, 2003)?

God's Grace

For centuries, grace and the sacraments have stood as foundational pillars of the Christian faith, functioning as conduits through which God's love and divine life are imparted to believers. The sacraments, rooted in Christ's ministry and perpetuated through the church, act as tangible manifestations of grace, bridging the gap between the human and the divine. Each sacrament carries within it the presence of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, working actively to sanctify the recipient (Hahn, 2001).

However, theological debates have long grappled with questions surrounding the efficacy of the sacraments under various circumstances. The primary question: Does the sacrament remain valid if the minister or recipient is morally imperfect? Can the failings of human agents nullify the grace of a sacrament? Such inquiries, while challenging, have ultimately reinforced the church's doctrinal understanding that the sacraments operate independently of human merit, as their efficacy is rooted in the power and authority of Christ Himself (Catholic Catechism, 1997).

The Council of Trent 1547 provided a definitive response to these enduring questions by codifying the ex opere operato doctrine. This principle asserts that the sacraments derive their efficacy from the action itself, performed according to Christ's institution, and not from the personal holiness of the minister or the recipient. The Catechism of the Catholic Church emphasizes that the sacraments are efficacious because of the work of Christ, whose authority and power ensure their validity (Hahn, 2001).

The sacrament of the Eucharist is inherently communal, as it is administered within the context of the church's authority. This communalism highlights the interconnectedness of the believers, bound together by the grace imparted through the sacrament. The Eucharist serves as a sacred encounter where believers are drawn into a deeper communion with Christ, experiencing the fullness of God's love and grace in their lives. This understanding reinforces the role of the sacraments as personal and communal acts of faith, emphasizing the presence of Christ's unifying love (Krantz, 2011).

` The principle of ex opere operato further highlights the Eucharist's independence from the priest's moral character. The grace imparted remains valid as long as the sacrament is performed with the church's intention and according to its established form. This theological truth redirects the focus from the minister's human imperfections to Christ's perfection. When believers participate in this sacrament, they look beyond the human clergy and recognize Christ's divine presence, working through the sacrament, bringing about spiritual transformation. This understanding affirms the sacraments' role as vehicles of grace that transcend human limitations, rooted in Christ's divine authority and power (Catholic Catechism, 1997).

The Eucharist is central in Catholic theology as a visible sign of invisible grace, affirming that Christ instituted it as an instrument of divine salvation. The Eucharist symbolizes heavenly grace and functions as a means by which this grace is imparted to the faithful. In this way, the sacraments act as gateways to fuller participation in the divine life, embodying Christ's promise of abundant life as articulated in the Gospel of John (*Holy Bible RSV*, 2009).

While grace is a gift from God, human response to this divine offering is essential to its effectiveness. The Eucharist invites believers to participate actively in the life of faith, encouraging them to cultivate a disposition of openness and receptivity to God's grace. Christians can deepen their relationship with God and grow in their capacity to respond to His call. This dynamic interaction between God's grace and human freedom highlights the nature of salvation, where God's initiative meets human willingness to cooperate with His plan. Such a relationship fosters a vibrant and transformative faith rooted in the life-giving power of grace (Hahn, 2009).

Grace is not merely an abstract theological concept but a transformative reality that is a part of each believer's spiritual journey. Through the Eucharist, this grace becomes accessible, drawing individuals into communion with Christ and His church. Each sacrament entrusted to the church by Christ is a visible sign of this invisible grace, affirming God's unwavering love and commitment to humanity. By participating in the sacraments, believers are reminded of their identity as members of the Body of Christ. They are empowered to live out their faith with renewed hope. Ultimately, the sacraments stand as enduring testimonies to the sufficiency of God's grace, reassuring that His love and mercy are always available, regardless of human weakness or imperfection (Catholic Catechism, 1997).

Sanctifying grace is foundational to the Christian's spiritual life, beginning with Baptism and sustained through participation in each of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. It establishes and strengthens the believer's relationship with God and enables them to grow in holiness. Actual grace, by contrast, acts as a divine nudge, prompting and empowering believers to respond to specific challenges or opportunities to live out their faith. Together, these forms of grace illustrate the dynamic interplay between divine initiative and human cooperation, revealing the transformative power of grace in all aspects of life (Catholic Catechism, 1997).

What distinguishes the Eucharist from other sacraments is the real presence of Christ in the forms of bread and wine. While all sacraments are means of grace, the Eucharist uniquely contains Christ's

Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity. This doctrine of real presence, deeply rooted in Scripture and tradition, emphasizes the unparalleled nature of this sacrament. The worthy reception of the Eucharist brings spiritual nourishment, fortifies the soul against sin, and deepens one's communion with Christ and the church (Catholic Catechism, 1997).

The Eucharist provides spiritual nourishment, fostering a deeper union with Christ, while reconciliation offers the grace of forgiveness and spiritual healing. This sacramental grace is not only transformative on a personal level but also contributes to the building up of the church, reflecting its communal nature and divine origin (Catholic Catechism, 1997).

The Witness of the Fathers

A closer examination of the statements made by the patristic witnesses in Catholic doctrine, particularly regarding the Eucharist and the sacrifice of the Mass, reveals a coherent view that remains relevant today. The writings of various early Church Fathers, many of whom had personal connections to the Apostles or were heavily influenced by them, can be regarded as reflections of genuine Apostolic teaching. Although these early Christian writers were not inspired in the same manner as the Scriptures, their texts, which date back to the second century, serve as a vital link between the traditions and teachings of the Apostles and later writings (Peterson, 1907).

Why focus on the Church Fathers? Why emphasize tradition? In addressing these questions, Paul commends the Corinthians: "I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I have delivered them to you" (*Holy Bible RSV*, 1 Corinthians 11:2). He further instructs the Thessalonians: "So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (*Holy Bible RSV*, 2 Thessalonians 2:15). Paul also states, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us" (*Holy Bible RSV*, 2 Thessalonians 3:6).

Apostolic tradition has continued after the deaths of the Apostles. For instance, in his letter to Timothy, St. Paul writes, "What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (Holy Bible RSV, 2 Timothy 2:2). The early Church Fathers act as the links in this chain of Apostolic tradition, recognizing the necessity of preserving these traditions with care. Kelly illustrates this by referencing Tertullian's concept that, "We are a body... knit together by the bond of piety, by unity of discipline and by the contract of hope." He articulates that there can only be one Church throughout the world, just as there is one God, one Christ, one hope, and one baptism; this is the bride of Christ referred to in the Song of Songs, the mother of Christians (domina mater ecclesia). Tertullian asserts that the Church is the unique home of the Spirit, the sole repository of Apostolic revelation, whose teachings are guaranteed by an unbroken succession of Bishops (Kelly, 1978, pp. 200-201).

Further, on this matter, Kelly cites the second-century Father Clement of Alexandria, who notes, "More often than not, however, what seems a firm reference to the Eucharist dissolves into an allegory of the true Gnostic's knowledge; feeding on the flesh and blood of the Logos means apprehending the Divine power and essence" (Kelly, 1978, p. 213).

Additionally, Sungenis references St. Justin Martyr, circa 163 AD, discussing not only the early Church but also the Eucharist, the Sacrament of Baptism, and the forgiveness of sins: "We call this food the Eucharist, of which no one is allowed to partake except one who believes that the things we teach are true and has received the washing for forgiveness of sins and rebirth, and who lives as Christ handed down to us. For we do not receive these things as ordinary bread or standard drink; but as Jesus Christ our savior, being incarnate by God's word, took flesh and blood for our salvation; so also, we have been taught that the food consecrated by the word of prayer, which comes from Him, is the flesh and blood of that incarnate Jesus" (Sungenis, 2009, p. 240).

Kelly also discusses Ignatius of Antioch, a first-century theologian and the second Bishop of Antioch after the Apostles, who witnessed Peter, Barnabas, and Paul. Ignatius affirms the Church's views

on the real presence in the Eucharist, stating explicitly, "the bread is the flesh of Jesus, the cup his blood." He intends for this realism to be taken literally, using it as the foundation of his argument against the Docetists' denial of Christ's real body. Irenaeus further supports this understanding of the Eucharist, teaching that the bread and wine are indeed the Lord's body and blood, an observation rendered more impactful due to its incidental nature while refuting Gnostic and Docetic denials of the Lord's true humanity (Kelly, 1978, pp. 197-198).

Another influential early Church Father, Origen, a pupil of Clement of Alexandria, wrote on the Eucharist, emphasizing the necessity of partaking in Christ's body and blood for eternal life: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you... The flesh thus spoken of is that of the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world... We must strive to convert the rawness of scripture into well-cooked food, preventing what is written from becoming flabby" (Commentary on John, 10, 13, NPNF I, v. 9, p. 390).

Practical Applications for the Church

In the year 2022, the question of Jesus' physical presence in the bread and wine of the Eucharist is increasingly significant. A 2019 report from the Pew Research Center, titled "What Americans Know About Religion," revealed concerning statistics about the understanding of Eucharistic theology among U.S. Catholic congregants. The report indicated that less than 50% of Catholic congregants are aware that the Catholic Church teaches that the Eucharist constitutes the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it reported that only one-third of Catholics believe in the doctrine of transubstantiation, which asserts this belief. Notably, it was found that approximately 63% of the most observant Catholics, those who attend Mass at least weekly, accept the Church's theological position on this matter (Pew Research Center, 2019).

The practical application of these findings necessitates an approach to education tailored to the social media generation. Schlumpf highlights this need by stating that it is essential to simplify complex

theological concepts for a generation accustomed to sound bites. Auxiliary Bishop Robert Barron, in a video response, supports this assertion, reiterating his belief that apologetics is crucial to reversing the decline in religious affiliation among young people. He identifies a significant failure on the part of Catholic educators, catechists, evangelists, and teachers who have not successfully communicated these vital doctrines (Schlumpf, 2019).

This indicates a pressing need for the Church to enhance its educational outreach to adult Catholics on this and other fundamental topics. However, the complexities inherent in theological teaching, along with the evolution of language over centuries, pose barriers to understanding. The meanings of terms such as symbol and reality have shifted, complicating their interpretation not only for theologians but also for lay Christians. The Church's communication in popular culture lacks clarity regarding these concepts (Schlumpf, 2019).

The issue transcends the boundaries of liturgical Churches. Protestant author Paul Little published two significant works, *Know What You Believe* (1967) and *Know Why You Believe* (1967), motivated by a discerned need for Christians to grasp the foundations of their faith amid the infiltrating influences of contradictory denominational views, even within seminary education. He aspired for his writings to aid believers in their spiritual journeys.

As articulated in 1 Peter 3:15, Christians are encouraged to "always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence" (*Holy Bible RSV*). This biblical mandate underscores the expectation that Christians be ready to articulate their beliefs. The phrase “make a defense” translates from the Greek term apologia, which signifies a reasoned argument or clarification. Such a defense necessitates an initial understanding of the subject matter (Hahn, 2018).

The role of Christ's presence in the Eucharist prompts critical inquiry. As outlined by Hahn in his work *The Fourth Cup,* one does not require advanced expertise in history or Hebrew to perceive the theological development of the Eucharist. He notes that traditional table blessings utilized during the

Seder meals have evolved to emphasize the fulfillment of Passover in Jesus Christ, particularly as He becomes truly present in the Eucharist (Hahn, 2018, p. 151). Unfortunately, theological training often distills the realities of Christ's physical body, His suffering, and His resurrection, manifested materially in the bread and wine during Mass, into abstract concepts devoid of practical significance. A comprehensive understanding of the Eucharist necessitates an exploration of the rationale and methodology underlying the sacrifice of the Mass. Without clear and robust explanations from the clergy regarding the Church's doctrinal beliefs, the faithful cannot fully appreciate the Eucharist (Hahn, 2018).

Deepening one's understanding of the Eucharist and the Mass is paramount for a devoted follower of Christ. An authentic recognition of Christ's real presence in the Eucharist, alongside an acknowledgment of humanity's role as active participants in the Mass, cultivates committed disciples of Christ rather than uninformed observers (Martos, 2001).

Thus, for Christ's followers, the Eucharist serves to enhance their union with Him. Through the Eucharist, congregants are united with the Savior and His Church. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* conveys this sentiment, stating, "The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus. Indeed, the Lord said: 'he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.' Life in Christ has its foundation in the Eucharistic banquet: 'as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me' (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1997, Sect. 1391).

Authors' Conclusions: The Eucharist and Its Relevance Today

For over 2000 years, the sacraments have been vital in fostering community among Christian believers. These shared rituals create moments of collective joy, mutual respect, and spiritual connection, reminding adherents of their shared faith and reinforcing their sense of belonging to a more inclusive spiritual community. By strengthening bonds among believers, sacraments encourage support, solidarity, and unity within the faith community.

Sacraments are deeply significant within the liturgical traditions of the Christian church. These sacred rites are imbued with profound spiritual symbolism and meaning, enabling individuals to draw closer to their community and reaffirm their commitment to its teachings. Rich in obligatory rituals and profound symbolism, sacraments serve as powerful expressions of faith.

Sacraments are most closely associated with the Orthodox, Catholic, and Celtic church traditions, symbolizing God's love and abiding presence. They nurture spiritual growth, strengthen faith, and foster a lasting union with God the Father, elevating the spiritual maturity of those participating in them. As sacred rites, sacraments highlight those pivotal moments in a believer's spiritual journey and affirm the essential tenets of the orthodox Christian faith.

Sacraments possess transformative power, profoundly impacting the spiritual lives of the faithful. These sacred rites are far from meaningless rituals; they are significant practices that connect individuals to the divine, impart grace, and foster spiritual growth.

A fundamental aspect of the sacraments' significance lies in their ability to make God’s invisible grace tangible to the believer. The sacraments offer divine grace through physical elements, such as water, bread, wine, and oil, or gestures like laying hands. This tangible dimension reinforces faith and strengthens believers' trust in God's presence.

Moreover, sacraments play a vital role in fostering community within the church. Through shared participation in these sacred rites, individuals experience unity and a sense of belonging within a broader spiritual family. By facilitating connections and mutual support, the communal nature of the sacraments creates an environment that nurtures spiritual growth and strengthens bonds among followers of Christ. The Sacraments are a fundamental part of a believer's religious experience, and their lasting effects transform lives, leaving a lasting impact that cannot be overlooked. Deeply rooted in biblical texts, these sacred rites enable believers to experience God's divine grace and foster spiritual growth. When believers

immerse themselves in these sacraments, they find themselves closely related to God, fellow believers, and society.

The Eucharist is the foundation and peak of Christian life. Through the Eucharistic liturgy and our prayers before the Blessed Sacrament, we connect with God's presence meaningfully and personally. However, the Eucharist also has a social dimension; without the active expression of love, our community can feel divided. When we come together to celebrate the Eucharist, it teaches us about the dignity of every person and calls us to nurture the right relationships with God, ourselves, and others. As the Body of Christ, we are commissioned to transform our communities, neighborhoods, and the world. Church teachings, based on Scripture and Tradition, highlight both the individual and communal aspects of the Eucharist. This idea is reinforced in the writings of church fathers and saints, who encourage us to meet Christ in the Eucharist.

For centuries, the sacred and mystical Eucharist has captivated the hearts and minds of believers, profoundly symbolizing their faith. The faithful have long sought to uncover its profound meaning and significance, examining its origins and vital role in the Christian tradition.

At its heart, the Eucharist embodies the body and blood of Jesus Christ, given for the salvation of all. Catholics believe that during the consecration of bread and wine, the Holy Spirit transforms these elements into the real presence of Christ. This belief, known as transubstantiation, distinguishes the Eucharist from other Christian practices.

Participating in the Eucharist is a means for believers to connect with Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, accept forgiveness for their sins, and receive the promise of eternal life. It is a moment of spiritual nourishment and a time to bond with fellow believers as they gather to remember and celebrate a key event in Christian history.

The Relationship of Baptism and the Eucharist

Baptism serves as the entry point into the Christian faith, paralleling the biological commencement of life. However, the transition to Divine Life is achieved only through a form of death; specifically, an immersion in water that mystically represents dying and being interred with Christ. The Eucharist, on the other hand, is a sacrificial act that unites us with the Death of Christ. In contrast, Baptism is a more passive depiction of that death, especially in the case of infants, whose will is represented through their sponsors. The Eucharist provides a more active portrayal of Christ's death, as the Mass serves as a non-bloody representation of His sacrificial death outside Jerusalem. The church Fathers frequently noted the profound connection between Baptism and the Eucharist; the blood and water that flowed from Christ's side during the Crucifixion held significant meaning. Water symbolized our regeneration, thus representing Baptism, while blood, the cost of our Redemption, signified the Eucharist.

One key difference is that in Baptism and other sacraments, except for the Eucharist, we connect with Christ through His grace. However, Christ is truly present in Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in the Eucharist. The Eucharist allows us to experience a deeper connection to Christ's Death and Resurrection than Baptism. Just like how a child resembles their parents at birth, a mother creates a stronger bond with her child through nourishment. In Baptism, we resemble the Divine nature, becoming 'other Christs'; but in the Eucharist, we receive the essence of Christ Himself.

Baptism and the Eucharist share a similar connection to faith and love. Baptism represents the sacrament of faith, laying the groundwork for our spiritual journey. On the other hand, the Eucharist symbolizes love, commemorating Christ's ultimate act of love through His crucifixion and His self-giving in Holy Communion.

Surrender Within the Eucharist During Mass

During the Mass, a part coincides with the Offertory, where people bring gifts such as bread, wine, or items that can be purchased. Just as a ring symbolizes a lover's commitment, bread and wine represent

a person's dedication to Christ. This is evident in a couple of ways: first, bread and wine have always been essential for life, so when someone brings these, they offer a piece of themselves. Second, the willingness to sacrifice for someone special is illustrated in the bread and wine; no other items transform as much as wheat and grapes. Wheat undergoes the milling process, and grapes endure the winepress before being offered to Christ at the altar. Therefore, witnessing bread and wine during the Offertory signifies the faithful offering themselves to Christ.

The congregation's representation on the altar during the Mass is notably manifested through the elements of bread and wine. This transformation occurs in the moment of Consecration when the priest, acting in the person of Christ, proclaims, “This is My Body” and “This is My Blood.” According to Catholic doctrine, this act signifies the transubstantiation of the bread into the Body of Christ and the wine into His Blood (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1376).

In this sacred moment, the faithful participate in a more profound communion, affirming their union with Christ by echoing the priest’s declaration, “This is my body; this is my blood.” This acknowledgment is significant, as it embodies a collective offering: “Take it, I no longer need it for myself.” Such a proclamation highlights a profound transformation of the essence of the faithful, aligning their wills and desires with those of Christ (McGuckin, 2011).

This alignment fosters a radical self-giving, wherein individuals lose their sense of self in the redemptive narrative of Christ. Theologians argue that this process is essential for the faithful's spiritual maturation, as it invokes a total surrender to the divine (Benedict XVI, 2006). As a result, the Eucharistic celebration becomes not merely a ritual, but a transformative encounter that reshapes the identity of the believers within the Christian community (Bonaventure, 1993).

Through the Eucharist, we are United

Catholics often use the phrase to hear Mass, but it shows how little people grasp about truly participating, not just with Christ, but also with all the saints and church members throughout time. This

collective action of the church is reflected in specific prayers during Mass. For instance, right before the Consecration, we ask God to accept the offering that thy servants and whole household make unto Thee. After the Consecration, the congregation says, We thy servants, along with thy holy people, offer to thy most excellent majesty the gifts You have given us. Everyone is involved, but the closer we get to the mystery, the more united we become with Christ.

In the intricate tapestry of human existence, the notion that true fulfillment of personality arises from action rather than mere reflection is an enduring theme. Throughout human history, this imperative to act has manifested in various forms of sacrifice, where individuals have sought to align themselves with offerings that exceed mere symbolic gestures. The ritualistic laying of hands upon a chosen animal, often perceived as the best of the herd, embodies an ancient and primal recognition of the interconnection between man and the divine.

By engaging in such acts, humanity has historically signified a surrender of self, relinquishing individual identity to forge a greater unity with that which is greater. In the ritual of consumption following the sacrifice, there exists an even more poignant statement of identification; by consuming the sacrificial offering, the individual assimilates the essence of the divine. This resonates in the Christian tradition during the Mass, where all the ancient foreshadowing of Christ's ultimate sacrifice is not merely remembered but becomes a living reality. Here, man immolates himself alongside Christ, inviting divinity to take possession of his very being through the offering of body and blood.

This process engenders a transformation: destroying the ego creates a void and becomes receptive to the divine. In this dynamic interplay of loss and gain, man experiences a radical shift; he dies to the past and the weight of previous identities, thus allowing for rebirth and renewal in future existence. Within this sacred exchange, the individual finds a pathway to unity with Christ, participating in the death and resurrection.

One embraces the surrender of temporality and the relinquishing of ego and embodies the essence of divine eternity. Chastened by trials yet undeterred, one discovers resilience in sorrow, joy amidst grief, and a communion with the infinite. Therefore, within this crucible of sacrifice, nothingness is not merely accepted but transmuted into everything, revealing the profound truth that through dying, one truly lives.

The Eucharist as Nourishment

The Eucharist offers significant spiritual benefits for those who believe. It connects us with Christ, brings us forgiveness and healing, and supports our spiritual journey. This sacrament is a holy symbol that powerfully reminds us of Christ's presence in our lives, helping us grow and remain firm in our faith. The Eucharist is a potent symbol that nourishes the soul in various ways,

1. Union with Christ: When we partake in the Eucharist, we enter deep communion with Christ Himself. By consuming His body and blood, we become one with Him, allowing His divine presence to strengthen and transform us from the inside out. This union with Christ fosters a closer relationship with Him and deepens our faith.

2. Forgiveness and Healing: The Eucharist offers spiritual healing and forgiveness of sins. Through this sacrament, we are reminded of Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross, shedding His blood for the redemption of humanity. As we receive the Eucharist, we are granted absolution and the opportunity to partake in God's divine mercy, restoring our souls and guiding us towards a path of righteousness.

3. Just as physical food nourishes our bodies, the Eucharist sustains our souls. This sacrament nourishes our spiritual hunger, giving us the strength and grace necessary to face life's challenges. The Eucharist offers us the spiritual energy and wisdom needed to navigate through our journey of faith.

4. It serves as a reminder that the fullness of personality, the consummate realization of the self, lies not in passive contemplation but in the active choice to intertwine one's fate with the divine. Thus, the

ages testify to this truth: in every act of surrender, humanity converges with the sacred, and in that holy act, finds the ultimate expression of existence.

Unity and Fellowship through the Eucharist

The Eucharist brings believers together and creates a sense of community. It represents the connection between Christians, helping them bond with each other and with God. When people participate in the Eucharist, they gather as a community to share in the body and blood of Jesus. This communion highlights their unity in faith and strengthens their dedication to living by Christ's teachings. This sacrament reminds them of their shared beliefs and values and inspires them to support each other on their spiritual paths.

The Eucharist is an excellent reminder of how crucial forgiveness and coming together are in the Christian community. When people share this meal, it encourages them to think about their behavior and to show love and forgiveness to each other. This shared act of forgiveness helps mend rifts and builds stronger connections among believers, fostering a sense of unity and togetherness in the church.

Additionally, the Eucharist serves as a spiritual boost, giving believers the grace and strength to practice their faith daily. It feeds their souls, helping them connect more deeply with God and live out Christ's teachings in their daily interactions. This, in turn, strengthens the bonds among believers, fostering a sense of community and togetherness that goes beyond just the church walls.

Embracing the power of the Eucharist sacrament is essential for communal unity and fellowship among believers. By partaking in this sacred meal, Christians are reminded of their shared beliefs, forgiveness, and love for one another and are spiritually nourished for their faith journey. Through the Eucharist, the bond among believers is continually strengthened, creating a community of support, love, and unity.

Unity with Christ through the Eucharist

One of the things that happens with Holy Communion is that we get back from Christ what we offered Him. We handed over our human nature when Mary, representing all of humanity, gave Him manhood, just like us in every way except for sin. He transformed that human nature because it became truly united with His Divine Person. In the Eucharist, He returns it to us, cleansed, renewed, and elevated, serving as a promise and assurance of what our nature will become on the Last Day during the resurrection of the righteous. Our Blessed Lord made this point so clear that it is hard to see how anyone could miss it.

The point is stated plainly in St. John 17:21-22, “that they may all be one; that they too may be one in us, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee; so that the world may come to believe that it is thou who has sent me. Furthermore, I have given them the privilege which thou give me, that they should all be one as we are.”

In nature, living beings take in food and turn it into their essence. But in the Eucharist, the dynamic flips. The Eucharist nourishes our souls, yet Christ does the assimilating. He feeds us and brings us into His life. Unlike regular food that changes into us, we are the ones who become part of Him. As John the Baptist puts it: He must increase, while I must decrease.

The Eucharist connects us to Christ's life and His death, which is often overlooked. St. Paul points out that every time we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until He returns. He also reminds us that we need to embody the suffering of Christ in our own lives. We must reflect Christ's life in our actions to save our souls. We should follow His example from His birth, through His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. However, we can only access those heavenly gifts by embracing the Cross, which means practicing penance, self-discipline, and letting go of our selfishness.

Jesus speaks about our connection with Him during the Last Supper, comparing it to the relationship between a vine and its branches. St. Paul also mentions that we are many and united because we share the same bread. Being completely independent does not exist in the scriptures or in human life.

Everything in history has changed; humanity and the world have been transformed. Humanity was altered through the Incarnation, while the world was changed through the sacraments and symbols that bring our personalities to life.

The Eucharist as a Means of Healing

The Eucharist has been seen as both nourishment and a source of healing for over two thousand years. In the Gospel of John, Jesus mentions, “My flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.” About a century later, Ignatius of Antioch wrote to the Ephesians about sharing one bread, referring to it as the medicine of immortality. This remedy helps us live forever through Jesus Christ. The Eucharist serves as both sustenance and healing. In the fourth century, Syrian Bishop Serapion of Thmuis prayed that those who partake in it receive life-giving benefits that can heal all ailments and strengthen growth and virtue (Schaff, 1910).

In the 1700s, St. Alphonsus Liguori described the Eucharist as a way to help us overcome our everyday mistakes and avoid grave sin. It cleanses us of minor sins, rekindles our love, and helps us detach from unhealthy attachments, allowing us to connect more deeply with Christ. The Eucharist also refreshes, fortifies, and enhances our unity with the church, which we initially entered through Baptism. It is truly a source of healing and wellness (Schaff, 1910).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church highlights that the Eucharist serves a healing role. It spiritually heals us by washing away our sins and renewing our love for others. The Catechism likens this effect of the Eucharist to that of regular food. Just as physical nourishment helps regain lost energy, the Eucharist boosts our love, which can fade in everyday life, and this active love helps erase venial sins.

Jesus helped a few specific individuals: Simon Peter's mother-in-law, who was sick with a fever; a centurion's son; a man with a withered hand; a man unable to hear or speak; and a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years, among others. He also cured all sorts of sick people: lepers, the paralyzed, the blind, those who could neither hear nor speak, and many others with various illnesses. This Jesus is truly

present in the Eucharist. Just as many of the sick in His earthly ministry sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them, let us, by faith, touch Him in the Eucharist, and we will be made well.

The Eucharist is not meant to heal like the sacrament of Reconciliation, but it has its healing role. Comparing it to physical nourishment helps us understand how it can heal. Food and water are crucial for staying healthy; even if they are not technically medicine, the Eucharist serves a similar function. It nourishes, supports, and restores love to a person's soul. The Catechism specifies the Eucharist's healing purpose when received as a viaticum. The Latin word viaticum literally means provision for a journey. In the church tradition, viaticum refers to the Eucharist when it is received in the moments preceding death, the final journey to God.

The Eucharist as a Source of Grace

The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist holds significant spiritual importance for the faithful, acting as a conduit of grace through which God bestows His blessings upon believers. By receiving the Eucharist, Christians can experience a deep and personal connection with Christ. This connection goes beyond mere symbolism, as it represents a genuine engagement in the life of Christ. The Apostle Paul's remarks in 1 Corinthians emphasize this truth, highlighting the participation in the body and blood of Christ through the elements of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is like a source of divine grace, giving us the spiritual energy to stay strong in our faith journey. Each time we receive it, we get a boost of grace that helps us pursue holiness. This sacrament is a refreshing well of spiritual life that rejuvenates our souls. Ultimately, it is not just any gift, but the ultimate gift of Christ Himself. He embodies the way, the truth, and the life, overflowing with God's love and mercy. Through this sacrament, He connects us to Himself and supports us through tough times and celebrations. He grants us grace to inspire us towards greater love, kindness, and helping others.

The Holy Spirit holds a crucial position in the Eucharistic celebration. By the power of the Holy Spirit, divine grace enables believers to attain forgiveness, as elucidated by St. Ambrose, a Doctor of the Church, in the 4th century (Schaff, 1887). Each time we partake of this bread and drink from the cup, we announce the death of the Lord. In proclaiming the Lord's death, we also declare the forgiveness of sins. Since His blood is consistently shed to forgive sins, I must continually partake of it to ensure the ongoing forgiveness of my transgressions. Given my persistent sinfulness, I require a constant source of remedy.

Through the grace of God manifested in the Eucharist, the believer's engagement inherently fortifies the bonds of charity among them. In referring to charity, the church does not imply mere concern for the less fortunate; instead, she signifies caritas, the profound, selfless love exemplified by Christ. In our union with Christ, we simultaneously unite with one another. Jesus brings us together as one Body, which constitutes the church. When we partake in Communion appropriately, we permit God to instill His will within our hearts and lives. Through Him, we enhance our roles as brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers. The Eucharist nourishes us individually, yet it is also essential sustenance for the unity of the faithful.

The grace of God, revealed through the actual presence of Christ in the Eucharist, profoundly transforms the lives of believers. By receiving the body and blood of Christ, they experience spiritual nourishment and fortification. This nourishment goes beyond mere physical sustenance, engaging the entirety of the individual's body, soul, and spirit. In the Gospel of John, Jesus emphasizes that eating his flesh and drinking his blood is essential for true life. Those who partake in this sacrament gain eternal life and hope for resurrection on the last day. Thus, the Eucharist is crucial for spiritual vitality and support, empowering believers to live out their faith with renewed enthusiasm and dedication.

Furthermore, the Eucharist possesses a sanctifying influence. As the faithful partake in the Eucharist, they are increasingly molded into the likeness of Christ. The grace bestowed through this sacrament aids them in pursuing holiness and their struggle against sin. This transformative nature is

eloquently expressed in the prayer of St. Thomas Aquinas, which suggests that in the Sacred Banquet, where Christ is received, the remembrance of His Passion is rekindled, the soul is enriched with grace, and a promise of future glory is granted to us.

John 6:67-68

Jesus said to the twelve, "Will you also go away?"

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."

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